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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY: FEMALE SURFACE  
WARFARE OFFICERS' DECISIONS TO LEAVE THEIR  
COMMUNITY**

by

Sharon Graham

March 2006

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Alice Crawford  
Gail F. Thomas

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**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY:  
FEMALE SURFACE WARFARE OFFICERS' DECISIONS  
TO LEAVE THEIR COMMUNITY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to discover the reasons that female Surface Warfare Officers (SWO) leave the Surface Warfare Officer Community and to identify paths that might encourage them to stay. Seven focus groups and nine interviews were used to gather qualitative data from three groups: 1) SWOs who had expressed intentions to leave the SWO community; 2) officers who had laterally transferred to another Navy community; and 3) individuals who had separated from the Navy. Altogether, 49 individuals participated in the study; 23 women and 26 men. Men were included to examine gender similarities and differences. Based on responses from all participants, six major themes emerged to explain why both male and female officers may leave the community: 1) inconsistent leadership; 2) negative aspects of the culture; 3) lack of passion; 4) inability to achieve work/life balance; 5) excessive work-hours; and 6) the mundane nature of some tasks. Only three themes emerged that were different for the women: 1) inflexibility of career for family planning; 2) lack of positive senior role models; and 3) a perception of discrimination, sexual harassment, and lack of respect for women. It appears that the Navy may need to attack the retention problem on a number of fronts if it wishes to improve the retention rate for women. Continuation pay, which is currently a primary lever for increasing retention, was not viewed favorably as a means for getting male or female officers to stay in the community. The thesis concludes with recommendations for further research.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND

The Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) Community is the oldest community within the Navy and is considered to be “the base upon which maritime dominance is built.” ([www.swonet.com](http://www.swonet.com), December 2005) Today, over 8,000 SWOs are responsible for maritime dominance, driving the ships and ensuring the safety of subordinates and equipment under their charge. With such an important role to play, all members of the community are important. Senior leadership wants to retain the current knowledge capital to ensure the community continues to be a dominating force. Retaining human capital is not necessarily a gender issue, but for the SWO Community, females leave at a higher rate than male peers. The higher loss rate of females is of particular concern to leadership. Therefore, this thesis is an exploratory study into the reasons why females are leaving the SWO community.

Currently, women account for only 14.2 percent of the officers in the SWO community. As Table 1 illustrates, the SWO Community has the second largest population of women officers. However, comparing the total number of women in the community with the number of total officers in the community, the Surface Warfare (14.2 percent) community as women is a distant third behind the Nurse Corps (63 percent) and the Human Resources Community (41.7 percent).

**Table 1. Distribution of Women Officers**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Distribution<sup>a</sup> (percent)</b>
<b>Nurse Corps</b>	23.2
<b>Surface Warfare</b>	14.2
<b>Aviation</b>	9.6
<b>Human Resources</b>	3.8

Source: Author. Email communication from LT Stephanie Miller, N1, December 2005 and February 2006

Note: This table does not contain information for all Navy Communities.

<sup>a</sup> Percentage of women in community as compared to total number of women officers.

The Nurse Corps and administrative occupations were the initial jobs held by women in the Navy. In 1908, nurses became the first women to serve in the Navy; and in 1913, nurses became the first military women to experience life aboard a naval vessel.

The exclusion of women for positions onboard ship, other than nursing, continued until the launching of a pilot program in 1972. The pilot program continued until 1978 when Congress authorized women to serve on support and noncombatant vessels. Even then, Title 10 USC 6015 prohibited women from serving on vessels designated as combatants. Congress repealed the Combat Exclusion Law in 1993, and by 1994, all classes of ships were open to women. (<http://www.npc.navy.mil/AboutUs/BUPERS/WomensPolicy/history.htm>, November 2005)

Repealing the Combat Exclusion Law increased the number of female SWOs from 264 in 1992 to 1,212 today. Although women have experienced an increase in accessions at the 0-1 level, from 11 percent in 1994 to 26.2 percent in 2004, this increase in female representation disappears after the 0-2 paygrade (Pecenco, 2005). In 2004, the most recent data available, females comprised 14.9 percent at the 0-3 paygrade and only 2.0 percent at the 0-4 paygrade (Pecenco, 2005). According to the July 2004 Surface Warfare Community briefing, women represented only 1.85 percent of the 0-6 paygrade.

In the last 10 years, the Navy began facing a retention crisis of officers eligible for department head billets. For every department head billet the community must access three new officers. (Surface Warfare Community Brief, 2004) This crisis led to the implementation of the Surface Warfare Officer Continuation Pay (SWOCP), a special pay initially worth \$50,000. Accepting SWOCP commits an officer to completing department head school and two at-sea department head tours. However, the SWO community is interested in increasing the amount of SWOCP as well instituting a new special pay for critical skills (Critical Skills Bonus, CSRB). (<http://www.navy.mil/navydata/cno/n76/index.html>, December 2005) These incentives are offered to try to increase the number of officers agreeing to remain on active duty through the department head tours. Without an increase in the number of officers remaining on active duty, the Navy will continue to over access new officers to meet the required department head steady state.

Although the overall retention rate of SWO officers is 34.7 percent, (T. Hart, Pers 41, personal communication, January 4, 2006) senior leadership is especially interested in the retention rate of female officers. Currently, the average female retention rate for the

period 2002-2004 is 17.8 percent while the male rate for this same period is 38 percent. (S. Miller, N1, personal communication, December 8, 2005) Senior leadership would like to increase the female retention rate to 20 percent. (T. Hart, Pers 41, personal communication, January 4, 2006) However, it is not possible to improve the situation without understanding the reasons women leave the SWO Community at a higher rate than men or what incentives would keep women in the community. Therefore, this research is concerned with uncovering reasons why females leave the SWO Community at a higher rate than their male counterparts. Although there are surveys regarding this issue, this research collects qualitative data from SWOs to gain an in-depth understanding of reasons they leave and incentives/solutions that could affect retention.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTION, SCOPE AND METHOD**

This research answers the following questions regarding the decision of women to leave the Surface Warfare Community:

- Primary question:
  - Why are female Surface Warfare Officers leaving the community?
- Secondary question:
  - What percentage of the force chooses to stay or leave?
  - Are the reasons females leave the Surface Warfare Community the same as the reasons men leave the community?
    - Is there a gender difference in the motivation of men and women?
    - Is there a gender difference in the ambition of men and women?
  - What incentives can be used to retain female Surface Warfare Officers?
  - Are there reasons for leaving the Surface Warfare Community that cannot be addressed by incentives?

Focus groups and interviews were conducted to answer the research questions. Participants included current SWOs who have not accepted Surface Warfare Officer Continuation Pay (SWOCP), former SWOs who transferred to another community, and SWOs who have separated from the Navy. Participants who have not accepted SWOCP were from year groups 01 or 02. These individuals were in paygrades O-2 or O-3. Those

who have already left the community were from any year group. Male and female officer's participated in separate focus groups or interviews.

### **C. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY**

Chapter II reviews research into the problem of women leaving the workforce, specifically, their ambition and motivation. In addition, Chapter II lists retention practices of civilian institutions. Chapter III describes the research methodology. Chapter IV discusses the results of the focus groups and provides an analysis of the themes uncovered from the data. This thesis concludes with Chapter V, which provides some recommendations for further research and possible ways to reduce the loss rate of Surface Warfare Officers.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A large part of the potential talent pool consists of females and historically underrepresented groups. With the professional labor market tightening, it is in our direct interest to give serious attention to these matters of retention and reattachment.

- Melinda Wolfe, Goldman Sachs (Hewlett and Luce, 2005, p.54)

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Women are becoming an integral part of the public and private workforces. Despite increasing numbers of women entering the workforce, many do not remain until retirement. In the Navy, women are not remaining a part of the SWO Community even until the six-year point, let alone until retirement. The goal of this thesis is to uncover the reasons women leave the Surface Warfare Community.

An historical perspective of women's participation in the civilian labor force and military begins the chapter. This information lays the groundwork for why researching women in the labor force is an important topic. Over the last 35 years the labor force participation rate for women has steadily increased in both the military and civilian sectors. Today, women make up almost 50 percent of those in the United States labor force. During this time, women have started to leave behind traditional roles and have begun to enter traditionally male-dominated fields including the military. While women in the SWO community account for only 14.2 percent of the total group of SWOs, their numbers have grown significantly. Nonetheless, entering these male-dominated fields is not easy; women face many barriers and obstacles.

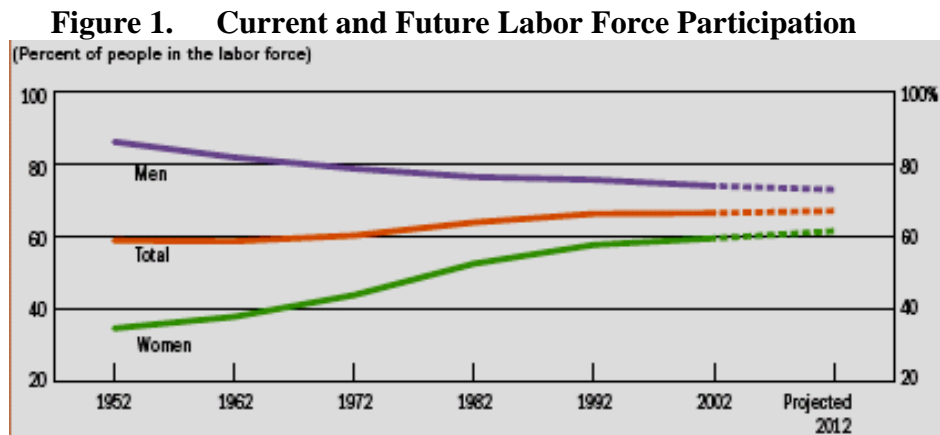
Next, turnover of the labor force is examined. By increasing their labor force participation, women now have to find a way to strike a balance between family and career. Balancing both a family and a career is difficult and many women choose to leave the labor force for family reasons. As research shows, some women do not make this choice easily. Further, researchers have begun to analyze the differences between the career development, job satisfaction, ambition, and motivation of men and women.

Finally, this chapter will briefly discuss practices that civilian corporations have instituted to retain female human capital. Many corporations have instituted work/life balance programs such as sabbaticals, reduced hours, flexible schedules and career flexibility. Since the military faces many of the issues related to retention of women that are seen in the civilian sector, it is necessary to examine the solutions used by civilian corporations for applicability to the military environment.

## **B. WOMEN'S WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION**

### **1. Civilian Workforce Participation**

The proportion of women in the labor force has grown substantially in the last 35 years. Since 1970, women have increased their workforce participation from 43 to 59.2 percent. (<http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/main.htm>, December 2005) Prior to this period women had been largely excluded from many professions and were seen primarily as wives and mothers with their place in the home. Today, women have the opportunity to enter most professions and now serve as Congress members, firefighters and police officers, and all branches of the military. The gains earned by women in the labor force have made them indispensable in almost every occupation. Figure 1 further illustrates the gains women have made and are projected to make through 2012.



Source: From *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, Winter 2003-04, p. 4

## 2. Women in Nontraditional Career Paths

Despite gains in the labor force, there is still a traditional path for women. Table 2 illustrates the most common occupations for women. Women who choose nontraditional career paths such as police officers, firefighters or U.S. Navy ship drivers may have obstacles to overcome but can reap large rewards such as challenging jobs, higher entry-level pay ,and a career ladder. (Malveaux, 1991 and [www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-nontra.htm](http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-nontra.htm), December 2005)

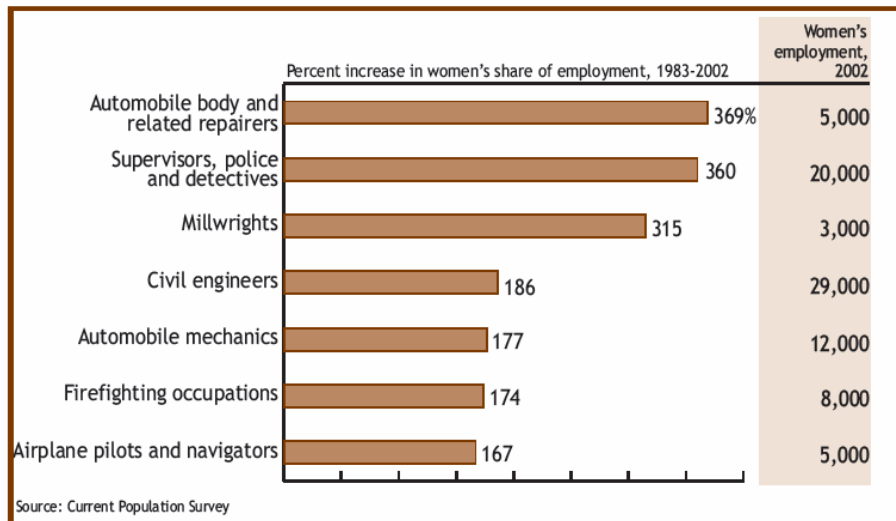
**Table 2. Top Four Occupations of Women**

Rank	Occupation	Total employed (in thousands)
1	Managers and administrators	2,486
2	Secretaries	2,366
3	Cashiers	2,288
4	Registered nurses	2,013

Source: From Infoplease (<http://infoplease.com/toptens/womenoccupations.html>)

Figure 2 illustrates the gains women are making in traditionally male dominated occupations.

**Figure 2. Male-dominated Occupations in Which Women Increased Participation 1983-2002**



Source: From *Occupation Outlook Quarterly*, Winter 2004-05.



The construction industry and firefighters illustrate the complexity of forging the way for other women. Women comprise 9.75 percent of the construction industry workforce; the majority of these women though, are working in the administrative side of the business. Only 1.5 percent of the hands-on construction workers are women. (Sarkar, 2002) Chicago Women In Trades (CWIT) and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) administered surveys to women in the construction industry to discover why the participation rate of women was so low. Results indicated 41 percent of the respondents had suffered gender harassment, 88 percent had experienced sexual harassment, and more than 50 percent of the women reported that men had refused to work with them. While these are major issues, women also reported problems with sanitary conditions in job site restrooms (if there was a female restroom), never having worked with another woman, and difficulty finding clothing and equipment to fit their smaller statures. (Sarkar, 2002)

Nationwide, women account for only 5.2 percent of the firefighters and these 14,000 women echo issues found in the construction industry. (<http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontrad2004.htm>, December 2005) Nevertheless, women have made gains in the field; in 1992, women comprised only 2.1 percent of the total. (Sarkar, 2002) The struggle for women to enter the firefighting community faced strong opposition from community leaders and firefighter unions, many of whom believe women did not have the strength to do the job properly and could not carry their share of the load. Discrimination and harassment still exist as evidenced by a quote from a San Francisco firefighter newsletter calling female firefighters “sisters-without-backbone” and “little girls playing pretend fireman.” (Stern, 2001)

At the same time, there is a bright spot to integration. San Diego has been successful in integrating their firehouses, albeit not without controversy in the early days. The first females did not graduate from the fire academy until four years after the lifting of the ban on women, female pin-ups were on firehouse walls, and men joined women in the showers. Top leadership would not accept these actions and disciplined the offenders. Being proactive, the union initiated a women’s issue committee in the 1980s

to examine issues such as recruitment, retention, pregnancy issues, harassment, and uniform issues. San Diego became one of the first in the nation to adopt a pregnancy policy. Upon learning of their pregnancy, women can request to transfer to a non-hazardous job without retribution or a reduction in pay. (Perry, 1995)

Female firefighters might be considered one of the closest occupations to military life, because they must have stamina and strength, stand twenty-four shifts several times a month, face dangerous situations on a daily basis and, for women firefighters, must overcome many other obstacles. During shifts, the firefighter eats, sleeps, and relaxes in the fire station, similar to the requirements of military members deployed or living aboard ship.

### **3. Women's Participation in the Military**

The military force has changed since the nation's inception, as cultural norms and beliefs have changed. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, women could not openly serve in any military occupation fields during wartime except for medical. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the military needed women to fill military positions even in non-war times, so administrative fields were opened to women. As the century progressed, and equal rights came in to the forefront, women earned the right to serve in more and more roles. Women were admitted to military academies in 1976. However, it was not until 1993 that the biggest barrier to women was removed--the Combat Exclusion Law. Prior to the repeal, there were only 66,755 women in the military. Today, there are more than 200,000 women in the military. (<http://web1.whs.osd.mil/mmids/military/rg0509f.pdf>, February 2006 )

For the Navy, women served in administrative and medical roles until 1972. Admiral Zumalt realized women held tremendous potential that was going unused. He issued Z-Gram format: 116 in 1972 beginning a pilot program for women on ships. (<http://www.npc.navy.mil/Npc/> , February 2006) Even though the pilot program was a success, Congress did not authorize women to serve on noncombatant vessels until 1978. Although these women served on noncombatants, their ships floated into combat zones. For the women serving on these noncombatants, women did not receive combat pay or the recognition of their male counterparts on combatant vessels. Finally, with the repeal of the Combat Exclusion Law in 1993, women finally were fully admitted to the Surface

Warfare Officer (SWO) Community. (<http://www.npc.navy.mil/Npc/> , February 2006)  
At the end of 1992, there were 264 female officers in the SWO Community, today there are 1,212. While women have made inroads in the military and the civilian workforce, obstacles to progress are still in place.

## **C. WORKFORCE TURNOVER**

### **1. Civilian Workforce Turnover**

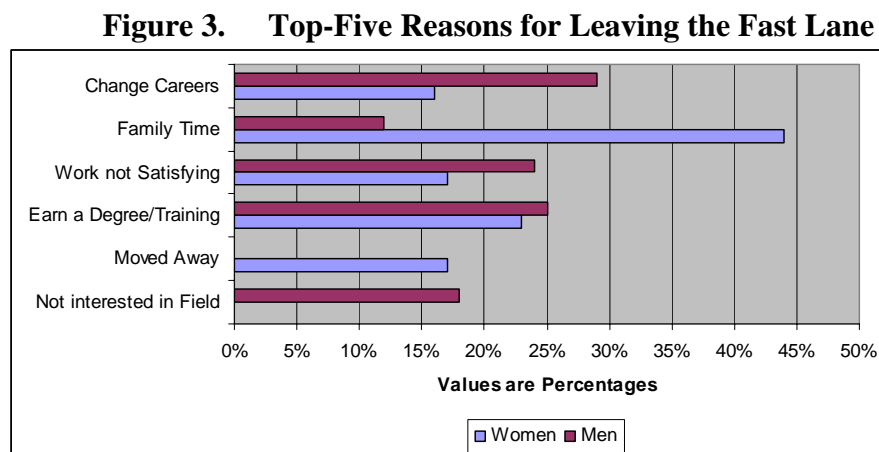
Despite the employment gains made by women, they do not remain in the workforce as long as their male peers. One reason is the expectations placed on women such as maintaining a career while also being a wife and mother. Despite two-thirds of college men in the 1980s believing that men should place “equal emphasis on children and career,” women continue to carry the childcare load. (Fels, 2004, p. 28) A recent study found only 12 of the 138 men surveyed shouldered as much childcare responsibility as their wives. (Fels, 2004, p. 29) As Fels (2004, pp. 15-16) says, men are often defined by their occupations, while many women are expected to continually reevaluate and restructure their lives and careers.

In reevaluating career decisions, many women chose an “off-ramp,” leaving their profession to care for the family. The exodus of these professional women is causing great consternation for corporate America and for that matter, other industrialized nations. Miller and Wheeler (1992) noted that in one company, the turnover rate of women, as compared to their male counterparts, is two and one-half times higher. Hewlett and Luce (2005), in a study of professional men and women, found that 43 percent of women with children had taken time out of their career for family reasons. The disparity between men and women is evident when you contrast the time out of work for women with that of men. Only 24 percent of men have taken time out of their careers. (Hewlett and Luce, 2005)

A 1986 *Business Week* article attempting to locate the top 100 corporate women of 1976 illustrates the brain drain from corporate America. Only 46 of these women were located; one-third of these women left the corporate world. (Rosen, Miguel, and Pierce, 1989) Rosen et al. (1989) surveyed 245 companies and found that over 50 percent

reported having moderate to severe problems attracting and retaining women professionals. Open-ended questions about the reasons for the high turnover led to the following results: better paying, higher opportunity jobs; relocation in conjunction with a spouse's relocation; assumption of full-time childcare responsibilities; resumption of education; and retirement. (Rosen et al., 1989)

The leading reason women leave the “fastlane” (success-oriented lifestyle) is for family, while the leading reason for men is to change careers. The top five reasons men and women leave the fastlane are graphically illustrated in Figure 3 using data from a survey of 2,443 women and 653 men. (Hewlett and Luce, 2005, pp. 44-45)



Source: Adapted from Hewlett and Luce, Off Ramps and On Ramps, *Harvard Business Review*, March 2005, p. 45

## 2. Military Workforce Turnover

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Military (DACOWITS) conducts annual focus groups with servicemembers to discuss issues of concern; recently the groups have focused on retention. DACOWITS found participating members from all four services echoed the results of the 2004 Status of Forces survey in that married officers are more likely to report an intention to remain on active duty. ([http://www.dtic.mil/dacowits/annual\\_reports/2004annualreport\\_w\\_cvr.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dacowits/annual_reports/2004annualreport_w_cvr.pdf), January 2006). The survey specifically showed that male and female married officers with children were more likely to report an intention to remain on active duty as compared to married officers without children. Interestingly, female married officers with working

spouses were less likely to report an intention to remain in the military than married male officers with a working spouse. Female and male junior officers are less likely to report an intention to remain on active duty than senior officers of both sexes. See Table 3 for a numerical breakdown of this information.

**Table 3. 2004 Status of Forces Retention Intention Data**

	Male (percent)	Female (percent)
Married		
With children	73	68
Without children	65	60
Single		
With children	76	68
Without children	58	53
Working spouse	70	63
Senior officers (O-4-O-6)	73	73
Junior officers (O-1-O-3)	66	54

Note: All numbers are percent.

Source: Adapted from DACOWITS 2004 Annual Report, p.5

A 2003 Defense Data Management Command briefing confirms the intention results from the DACOWITS report. Female officers without dependents left at higher rates than their male officer counterparts, 9.4 percent and 7.4 percent, respectively. Married female officers had the highest overall separation rates, 10.1 percent. The separation rates are directly related to the age of the officers separating. Similar to their civilian counterparts, women in their twenties are beginning to consider a family and may make the decision that military lifestyle is not conducive to their choice. ([www.dtic.mil/dacowits/annual\\_reports/ 2004annualreport w\\_cvr pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dacowits/annual_reports/2004annualreport_w_cvr.pdf), p. 16, January 2005)

## **D. CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

I think women have had difficulty always setting career goals, because culturally we are the nurturers and we are the ones having children and by whatever design culturally or morally or whatever, we tend to make sacrifices of ourselves.

- quote from study participant (Hite and McDonald, 2003)

### **1. Introduction**

Generally, career development is a series of sequential steps up the “corporate ladder” culminating in a powerful position. (Hewlett and Luce, 2005; O’Leary, 1997) Traditionally, the corporate ladder concept described men’s progression, and researchers assumed women followed the same pattern as men. As the opening quote illustrates, women do not always follow a traditional career progression. With the increasing number of women in today’s workforce, researchers have reevaluated this belief and have discovered women develop their careers in a different manner. Women plan their careers, but not with the belief that upward mobility is absolute. Instead, women state job satisfaction as important to their self-worth and thus are less likely to plan their careers sequentially and meticulously. (O’Leary, 1997)

While job satisfaction plays a key role in career development women also face many other hurdles in planning their careers. Women face many “pushes” and “pulls.” “Pushes could include low pay, lack of job challenge, inflexible work schedule, and dead-end career tracks. Pulls can include more attractive employment and changing priorities with respect to family and career goals.” (Rosen et al., 1989) Women also face sexual harassment, discrimination, lack of role models, and a need to justify their choice to begin a family. (Rosen et al., 1989) Table 4 lists the top problems executives from 245 participating organizations reported that women managers encountered in 1989. Surveys were mailed to over 2,500 recipients in a variety of industries with 245 usable surveys returned. Despite many hurdles in career development, numerous researchers have found the biggest issue is family and personal life implications. Women do not make career decisions in isolation, but in concert with questions such as “how will this impact my personal life and/or family?”

**Table 4. Problems Encountered by Women Managers and Professionals**

Nature of problem	Percent organizations rating moderate, great or very great
Exclusion from old boy network	68.8
Dual career family conflicts	66.4
Absence of mentors	65.1
Lack of female role models	61.6
Lack of challenging, high profile assignments	60.2
Difficulty with child care arrangements	59.8
Blocked career progress	59.2
Female stereotypes	55.3
Lack of support by male colleagues	51.9

Note: Respondents were asked to rate categories on a 5-point scale, (1) not at all, to (5) to a very great extent.

Source: Adapted from "Exodus of Women Managers," by Rosen et al. 1989.

## **2. Theories of Career Development**

Several researchers have developed age-related eras or stages for the development of women's careers. These theories all have one thing in common: age or lifestages are a major factor in making career decisions. Levinson (1978) believes women make career decisions based on unique experiences during each of the four eras: childhood (0-20); early adulthood (20-24); middle adulthood (40-60); and late adulthood (over 60). Each of these stages also has sub-stages. While Levinson's study participants were men in mid-career, White (1995) replicated the study with women in mid-career. Forty-eight women found through business networks were included in her study. The results validated Levinson's theory of life stages. For these women, however, the timing of events was different than the men in the Levinson study. While the developmental tasks were predictable and dealt with the same concerns as men, the major difference was the timing of the events. For the women, a decision to pursue a career was made later than men or career planning was not coherent. Once a career decision had been made, the women put off the family decision until their careers were established.

Another theory, developed by Larwood and Gutek in 1987, lends credibility to the pushes and pulls discussed by Hewlett and Luce in 2005 and Rosen et al. in 1989 (Cited in White, 1995) Larwood and Gutek contend that women's career development looks like

a tree with many branches. If a woman is not satisfied with her job or promotion opportunities, she may leave the workforce for the family branch. In essence, these researchers believe women have an alternative path as compared to men—the family. (White, 1995) Traditionally, men have not left the workforce for family life due to cultural norms. However, this fact is changing as many women are postponing childbearing and therefore, for many, the woman's career may be more high powered or high paying than the man. For Larwood and Gutek (1987) women's career development should not be limited to age-specific stages, but represents a dynamic based on individuality. (Cited in White, 1995)

Past research found that career development was an orderly process. However, these studies were conducted with male subjects. More recent studies, using female subjects, have shown that the careers of women develop differently than men. Although women encounter the same stages as men, these stages occur at different times because of family considerations. Women either choose to postpone a family until careers are established or leave the labor force for a family. Choices made by women are individual decisions and do not necessary follow a set path.

## **E. JOB SATISFACTION AND AMBITION**

For women, the most important aspect of a career is job satisfaction. Thus, job satisfaction, defined as the “positive emotional state resulting from evaluating one's job experiences” (Mathis and Jackson, 2006, p. 571), appears to correlate to retention rates. In other words, women are more likely then men to leave a job when they are not satisfied.

Miller and Wheeler (1992) conducted a regression analysis on intention to leave a job for women in three organizations—a large city government, a university, and a large publicly-held corporation. Faculty, academic administrators, firefighters, police officers, and other positions that were not generic across the public and private sector were excluded. Questionnaires about career and job mobility attitudes were distributed to over 950 individuals with 595 questionnaires returned. They found job satisfaction and age were highly significant in the decision to leave a job. Men, as compared to women, were



more satisfied with their jobs. Women were more dissatisfied with pay and promotion opportunities compared with others in the company in the same position. Women also were less satisfied with the recognition they received for their accomplishments.

While men may be satisfied with their current job, ambition overcomes their satisfaction and causes many men to climb the corporate ladder. For men, climbing the corporate ladder translates into a higher salary. For women, it is more important to know their work is meaningful than to have a higher salary. (Miller and Wheeler, 1992) While women are not lazy, Fels (2004, p. 5) found that women do not admit to having ambition; in their eyes, ambition in women implies “egotism, selfishness, and manipulative use of others.” While men on the other hand readily admit to being ambitious. Hewlett and Luce (2005) found almost one-half of the 643 men surveyed consider themselves ambitious while only one-third of the 2,443 women felt the same. One must master a skill and gain recognition to see an ambition to fruition. Herein lies the difference; for women, actively seeking recognition is a problem. (Fels, 2004, pp. 7-15) Researchers believe women do not need to seek recognition because women have more empathy than men. Empathy may cause women to experience more pain when they do not fulfill others’ wishes, essentially the wishes of men. Women are more likely to reduce their effort, thus lower their chance of recognition, when competing against men. (Fels, 2004, p. 40)

With mastery and higher goals, individuals develop a sub-identity according to Hall and reflected in Farmer as cited in White (1995). With a sub-identity, Farmer believes individuals develop a greater “career centrality.” This in turn leads to a continued investment in a career. However, Fels (2004) discounts this fact in the belief that women defer to men. Women see careers as “personal growth and self-fulfillment” while men see careers as leading them upward and to a reward. (Fels, pp. 39-46)

Women are oriented to self-fulfillment. Therefore, reaching a career milestone of higher responsibility and prestige is not necessarily the pinnacle of a woman’s career. For her, the pinnacle is doing a job that has meaning and is significant. Hewlett and Luce (2005) discovered that only 15 percent of the 2,443 surveyed women desired to hold a “powerful position.” In fact, higher on the desired list of these women was to associate

with people they respect, the freedom to be themselves at work, and the ability to be flexible in their schedules. Over 50 percent of these women also felt giving back to the community was an important aspect of their careers. (Hewlett and Luce, 2005) For the Navy, this could translate into women not desiring a command position.

## **F. EXAMPLES OF RETENTION PRACTICES OF CIVILIAN INSTITUTIONS**

As the number of women in the workforce increases, senior executives realize women are essential to maintaining their company's competitive edge. If women continue receiving training by their company and then leave, this is money wasted. To stem the tide of women exiting, corporations have developed a variety of incentives, which are described here.

Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that about 44 percent of women consider family during their pursuit of employment and career choices. Successful companies keep this in mind and develop family-friendly programs or fringe benefits to assist women, and an increasing number of men, in retaining their professions while caring for family. Examples from corporations such as Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Booz Allen and Hamilton, and Corning are described below.

### **1. Reduced Work Hours**

Johnson and Johnson Corporation took women's decision to leave the workforce seriously. This company offers women the choice of reduced-hour jobs. A fifteen-year veteran of the company says, "I thought I only had two choices – work full-time or leave – and I didn't want either. J&J's reduced-hour option has been a savior." (Hewlett and Luce, 2005) Pfizer offers sales professionals a reduced workweek (60 percent of normal hours). Employees can choose how they want to work these hours, e.g., three-day weeks, around children's school hours, etc.

### **2. Flexible Schedules**

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 27.5 percent of full-time workers were offered flexible schedules in 2004, up from 12.4 percent in 1985. The majority of those able to work flexible schedules are generally found in business or financial occupations. (<http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2005/jul/wk1/art01.htm>, December 2005) As

men are more likely to work in this industry, DiNatale and Borass (2002) found men were still slightly more likely than women to have flexible schedule options available. Many women believe respect of their abilities is important and one example of this respect is flexible schedules. Hewlett and Luce (2005, p. 51) found over 50 percent of the women interviewed believed this was the “golden ring” to accept a job.

### **3. Mid-career Flexibility**

Some occupations have an “up or out” ethos. Booz Allen and Hamilton lost more women than men in mid-career because of this inflexibility. Now, the company allows the opportunity for employees to “ramp up, ramp down,” choosing to work with the clients they find most interesting. In fact, the company even allows past employees to sign on for specific assignments, with some even working from home. Booz Allen and Hamilton realized the value of these past employees, many of whom are women who will eventually return to work fulltime; they want to be their employer of choice. (Hewlett and Luce, 2005, p. 52)

Female retention problems began to surface at the Corning Corporation in the early 1980s when over 13 percent of women at the company were taking an off-ramp. The company began attacking this problem head on in 1988. In 1988, the attrition rate was 8 percent so the company developed a committee to focus on female issues and changing the company culture. A new performance review system began, along with diversity training and new alternatives for maternity, disability and dependent care benefits. Interestingly, the company began a part-time work program, job sharing, work at home alternatives, flexible schedules and maternity (including adoption) leaves. Between 1988 and 1990, the overall attrition rate declined from 8 percent to 5 percent. (Solomon, 1990, pp. 102-104)

## **G. FURTHER SUGGESTIONS**

### **1. Remove the Stigma**

Many women, and men, feel there is a stigma associated with work/life balance. The perception is that if an individual takes time off, he or she is not pulling their share of the weight. To change this barrier, a corporate culture change must occur, starting with

senior leadership. Senior leadership must fully embrace the idea of work/life balance initiatives. (Hewlett and Luce, 2005, p. 52)

## **2. Stop Burning Bridges**

Hewlett and Luce (2005) found only five percent of the 2,443 interview participants would return to the employer they left. This is a sobering fact that many companies are losing valuable, trained talent which, in this ever tightening employment market, cannot be tolerated.

## **3. Provide Outlets for Altruism**

Women need to feel their work is worthwhile. Most women do not feel compensation is as important as doing something useful. Corporations can harness this desire by allowing women to pursue not-for-profit activities, mentoring or community advocacy. (Hewlett and Luce, 2005, p. 53)

## **4. Nurture Ambition**

Ambition in women is a struggle. They face never-ending challenges and, for many, they do not see a way to their goal. Corporations need to engage women with other successful women. Men have understood for years that networking is essential to reach your goals. As Time-Warner's executive vice president, Patricia Fili-Krushel says: "Company-sponsored women's networks encourage women to cultivate both sides of the power equation. Women hone their own leadership abilities but also learn to use power on behalf of others. Both skill sets help us increase our pipeline of talented women." (Hewlett and Luce, 2005, p. 54)

## **H. SUMMARY**

Although labor participation by women has increased, they still face many challenges. These challenges are slightly different for men and women and the academic community has only recently begun to realize this. Researchers have discovered that women do not follow the same path as men in climbing the corporate ladder. For women, the top rung of the ladder is not as important as enjoying their job and family. Family relationships may be more of a challenge when women are working, causing them to take an off-ramp.

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### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter III provides an explanation and background for choosing a qualitative methodology over a quantitative analysis. Typically, quantitative analysis involves numbers, while qualitative research involves analysis of longer, verbal or written responses. Qualitative research yields richer responses with a larger breadth and depth than numerical survey responses found in a quantitative analysis. For this thesis, a methodology using focus groups and interviews allowed the author to elicit a richer data set from females and males who have chosen to stay in or leave the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) community. These focus groups and personal interviews provided in-depth and personal experience information on the reasoning behind their decisions.

Specific procedures for conducting a focus group or interview are required to ensure high quality results. This chapter provides a description of the procedures that were used.

#### **B. PROCEDURES FOR FOCUS GROUPS**

##### **1. Focus Group Participants**

Four focus groups were conducted at Naval Station San Diego and three focus groups at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey. Naval Station San Diego participants were current SWOs in Year Groups 2001 or later who have not accepted Surface Warfare Officer Continuation Pay (SWOCP). Stipulations on the current SWO participants were necessary because the Navy is in need of department heads; individuals in Year Groups 01/02 are the near future department heads, and by not accepting SWOCP, have implied the decision has been made to leave the community.

Naval Postgraduate School participants (lateral SWOs) were not limited to a specific year group. The only limitation was they must be qualified SWOs who laterally transferred to another community. Separate focus groups were conducted for male and female participants as well as current and lateral SWOs. Table 5 provides detailed information on the number of participants in each focus group.

**Table 5. Distribution of Focus Group Participants**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Category</b>	
	Current SWO	Lateral SWO
Male		
Focus Group 1	3	5
Focus Group 2	12	3
Individual interview	0	1
<i>subtotal</i>	15	9
Female		
Focus Group 1	6	5
Focus Group 2	6	0
Individual interview	1	1
<i>subtotal</i>	13	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>

Source: Author

Note: Three officers did not attend focus groups but were interviewed individually.

Focus groups were conducted from September to December 2005. San Diego focus groups were conducted in the conference room at Afloat Training Group Pacific (ATG Pacific). The staff at ATG Pacific solicited participants by distributing an email to all ships in the San Diego area. NPS focus group participants were solicited through a posting on the school intranet check-in page as well as direct communication with lateral SWOs. The groups were conducted in a conference room in the Graduate School of Business and Public Policy.

## **2. Focus Group Protocol**

A set of questions was developed and tested prior to each focus group. Questions were open-ended to allow the respondent to provide details without placing any restrictions on their answers. Follow-on questions varied in each group based on the initial responses and openness of the group.

The standard questions for the lateral SWOs are found in Appendix A. Appendix B contains standard questions for current SWOs.

## **3. Focus Group Process**

After participants arrived, the facilitator provided an overview of the study, and her background. Three of the focus groups had two facilitators present therefore both facilitators provided an overview of their backgrounds. Prior to starting the discussion,

volunteers were assured of the confidentiality of comments and permission was requested to allow for the tape recording of the session. Participants were asked to complete consent forms prior to the start of the focus group.

Once permission was given, a volunteer began the introduction, by providing first and/or last name, commissioning source, year group, and ships served aboard. All participants introduced themselves. All participants provided information on the questions asked.

At the conclusion of the group, the facilitator provided a business card with contact information in case any group member wanted to provide additional information. Also, the facilitator offered to provide an electronic copy of the completed thesis if requested.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

All tape recordings of the focus groups and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts allowed for analysis of the focus group discussion and the identification of themes.

To analyze the transcripts, one sheet of poster board was labeled for each question. Then, the transcript was read to identify quotes that answered each of the prewritten questions. Once a quote was identified as answering one of the three questions, the quote was cut from the transcript and placed on a poster board. Each quote was then determined to be similar or different from other quotes already on the poster board. If the quote was similar, it was placed in a pile with the similar quotes. If the quote was different, a new pile was started. (Krueger and Casey, 2000, pp.127-143)

### **C. PROCEDURES FOR INTERVIEWS**

#### **1. Participants**

Focus groups for individuals who separated from the Navy (separated SWOs) were not possible because of the diversity of locations for participants. Therefore, six individual telephone interviews were conducted with volunteers. Four interviews were conducted with females and two interviews with males. Volunteers were found through focus group participants or fellow officers who knew someone who transitioned to



civilian life before accepting SWOCP. Participants live in various locations around the country.

## **2. Interview Protocol**

The participants were initially contacted via email to ensure willingness to participate. If the individual agreed, a mutually agreeable time was set for the author to telephone the participant. Telephone interviews were also recorded to allow for transcription. The participants were informed of the recording requirement both in the initial email and again at the onset of the interview. Interviews lasted between fifteen and thirty minutes.

A set of prewritten questions can be found in Appendix C. These questions were fielded prior to the first interview. Additional open-ended questions were asked to elicit more information from the participant.

## **3. Interview Process**

As mentioned above, a prearranged time for the interview was scheduled with the participant. The author, from her home, called the participant at the telephone number provided by the participant. Upon the participant agreeing, the individual was asked to identify how he/she was commissioned, in which year commissioned, and in which year separated from the Navy. The individual was also asked to identify the type of ships he/she was assigned.

At the conclusion of the interview, the author informed the participant an email would be sent including a demographic questionnaire and a consent form. The individual was asked to complete these forms and fax or email back to the author. Additional information from the participant was welcome and could be emailed to the author.

## **4. Data Analysis**

Transcription of the telephone interviews was conducted similarly to the focus groups. The analysis of telephone interview participants consisted of reading the transcript to find quotes that answered each of the questions.

Chapter IV provides the results from the analysis of the focus groups and individual interviews.

## **IV. FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

“Suck it up. You’re a SWO. That’s what happens.” It’s a hard life.

(current female SWO)

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The following chapter contains the results from the seven focus groups and nine individual interviews. Participants included 43 individuals currently serving on active duty—15 who laterally transferred from the SWO community to a restricted line community and 28 current SWOs. Six former SWOs who voluntarily separated from the Navy were interviewed via the telephone. Four of the six separated SWOs are drilling reservists. All participants responded to the same questions regarding their decision to leave the SWO Community and/or the Navy. Additional questions were asked to clarify or explain responses to the standard questions. Appendices A through C list the standard questions and initial probing questions.

The results of the focus groups and individual interviews were analyzed by Navy affiliation (current SWO, lateral SWO, or separated SWO) and question. For each group, individual responses to each question were analyzed and grouped with similar responses. Major themes specific to active duty females are presented first, followed by themes relevant to both male and female active duty officers. Responses from separated SWOs are presented in a separate section. Specific quotes from participants are included to illustrate the analysis. To protect the anonymity of participants, any identifying information was removed from quotes and replaced by three asterisk marks (\*\*\*).

### **B. CURRENT AND LATERAL SURFACE WARFARE OFFICERS**

Three themes emerged specific to females: 1) incompatibility with family; 2) lack of positive role models; and 3) discrimination/sexual harassment/respect. Six themes transcended gender. These six overarching themes that applied to both men and women were: 1) community leadership; 2) SWO culture; 3) a lack of passion for driving/commanding a ship; 4) work/life balance; 5) excessive work-hours; and 6) nature

of some jobs/tasks. Additionally, the lateral SWOs felt that pride is lacking in the community and that SWO skills are not transferable to a civilian career.

Since current SWOs are still members of the Surface Warfare Community, but without SWOCP, the first question was asked to ascertain the intentions of the participants.

**1. What is your current intention regarding the SWO community?**

Twenty-eight current SWOs expressed their intentions as follows:

- 13 females
  - 8 intending to leave the Navy
  - 3 requesting a lateral transfer
  - 2 unsure of intention (whether to request lateral transfer or leave the Navy)
- 15 males
  - 9 intending to leave the Navy
  - 3 requesting a lateral transfer
  - 3 unsure of intention (whether to request lateral transfer or leave the Navy)

**2. Why are you leaving the SWO community? Why did you leave the community?**

Three major themes emerged from the 19 active-duty female participants: 1) inflexibility of career/family planning; 2) lack of positive female role models; and 3) discrimination/sexual harassment/respect.

The discussions with the current and lateral female SWO participants led the author to believe that there are multiple, interlinked reasons causing individuals to leave the SWO community. Many of the themes overlap one another; for this reason some repetition will be seen in the discussion below.

**a. *Gender Differences: Inflexibility of Career Path for Family Planning***

For the participating women, the inflexibility of the SWO Community means having children on the Navy's schedule. The career pipeline of the SWO Community is inflexible; the women do not see a way to have children while on sea-duty without damaging their promotion opportunities. SWOs must complete sea-shore

rotation on a predictable path without deviation if a successful and upwardly mobile career is desired. For the most part, the women enjoy being a part of the Navy, but they find it difficult to plan for a family and commit to a rigid sea/shore rotation.

I talked to, ... some senior women SWOs. And they were talking about, “Oh no. You can definitely have children; you just have to time it right in your career.” And it started being like, “If you don’t, then you’re not going to hit the right promotion things.” And there’s some things that you can time. But, you’re not always going to be able to time everything. And it just seems like the SWO community is pretty rigid and that you couldn’t work very well with the SWO community and having children.

(lateral female SWO)

But the Navy mentality of, “Have a child when you’re on shore tour” is just ridiculous. And I don’t think that any job is worth rearranging my family life and my life around.

(current female SWO)

The participating women felt that remaining a SWO, in essence, would be putting their careers above family. It is difficult to juggle both a career and family and be in the SWO community.

...The main reason [I left the SWO community] was the lack of flexibility when it came to your career and family planning. If they want females to stay and be COs and drive ships for them, they need to be more flexible. You know, for men and women, because I know there’s a lot of Department heads out there, males, that would like to spend time with their children too, but they basically live on the ship.

(lateral female SWO)

***b. Gender Differences: Lack of Positive Female Role Models***

Despite women earning the right to serve aboard combatant vessels over ten years ago, there are still relatively few senior female SWOs. Such a small number of senior officers does not allow for consistent interaction with the junior female officers. For many women, they have never met a senior female SWO. For those who have met a senior female SWO, the interactions have not always been positive. Tainting these interactions are the perceptions of the personalities of the females in the community—either weak or malevolent.

One of the participants talked about lack of interacting with female SWO department heads. What little she knew was hearsay and portrayed female SWO leaders as harsh and workaholics.

There's no female role model in the SWO Community. There's, I don't know how many female Captains there are, but there's not that many. And the ones I have heard about, I haven't heard anything good about them. And, I've never had a female department head on my ship... You know, why, but you know, the ones I have heard are major bitches. They have no life, no family.

(current female SWO)

In another case, one of the participants contrasted two female SWOs she worked for. One of the officers was highly approachable but viewed as weak by her shipmates. The other was viewed as demanding and highly critical. For this officer, neither female proved to be a positive role model.

...When I first checked on board our ship, there were five other females. I had a female Department head, my OPs, and I had a female XO—very unusual. She had a family; she was a very nice woman, had an open-door policy. Everyone on the ship, even on up to, you know, the Department heads would be in her office talking about whatever. And, the flip side of that was my OPs officer was... She was just a bitch. She was mean to me, more than the others. And people would say, "Oh. She's hard on you because you're another female." No. I was brand new without any schooling. I was, I expected her to take me under her wing and sort of show me around. But she would just yell at me for not knowing stuff, when I'd [think], "I don't know. I just got here. Why don't you talk to me?" But I couldn't approach her. So, I talked to the XO a lot and ... she was a pretty good role model. But, unfortunately she also got a bad rap because she was too nice. So we had the one person that no one could talk to and the one person that was "too nice" that no one could ever imagine her driving the ship, you know. Because you have to have a little bit of bite in you, I guess. But she was more like, she was a great XO, but I couldn't imagine her being a CO just because of that.

(current female SWO)

Besides the perception of some female senior leaders being too harsh, leaders were seen as solely focused on their work without any time for a family. One participant praised a high-ranking female SWO for her competence, even calling her

inspiring. Nevertheless, the officer was put off that she didn't seem to have a life outside the Navy.

...She [is] like a high-ranking female SWO in the Navy, but she's an engineer. She knows her shit... and she doesn't take it from anybody. I mean, ...she's like inspiring, in all honesty. But in the same respect, I mean, she's not, she's not perfect. I mean, I don't know how happy she is. She doesn't have a family...She knows her job, and she does it well. But, her job is her life...How I view her in my mind, she doesn't have another life besides the Navy.

(current female SWO)

Probably the most consistent observation was the number of senior leaders who didn't have children or a family. One participant talked about the incompatibility of having a family and being a SWO.

I had a female CO... on my ship. So I had a lot of female leadership, but, it looked like all the senior leadership were either single or GEO bachelors. And I kind of realized that I don't want to do that. I wanted to stay in the Navy; I really like the Navy. But, I wanted to have a family too. I didn't see the SWO community as being able to do that.

(lateral female SWO)

Another participant expressed her concern of not seeing any female CO's with children and the absence of females in the most senior positions.

Where are these female CO's with the kids? Where are these married females? Where are these Admiral females?

(lateral female SWO)

***c. Gender Difference: Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Lack of Respect***

Some females perceive that they are treated differently than the men. These women believe there is discrimination in job assignments and that sexual harassment is still occurring. This discrimination in job assignments and the sexual harassment leads the participants to perceive that women are not respected the same as men.

Although not all female participants had personally experienced discrimination all had witnessed discrimination. Discrimination of women onboard ships

varies from lack of fair treatment to sexual harassment that is condoned by the leadership, from senior enlisted to the CO of the ship.

I saw on my ships just female officers get treated totally different. You know, the last to qualify, last to get boards, last to get anything.

(current female SWO)

I mean, I had some good experiences; I did like standing, like Officer of the Deck and some, some of the rewards that go with earning that pin and whatnot. But I had a hard time getting it because my Department, or the Senior SWO onboard, because of this investigation [shipboard investigation], turned his back on me and allowed everyone else to get qualified even though I was ready to.

(lateral female SWO)

The participants discussed how they have been discriminated against for specific jobs. One participant discussed how she was not allowed to participate in the Visit, Board, Search and Seizure team because she was a female.

And I've seen how they've treated women on specific issues. For instance, I wasn't allowed to be on \*\*\* crew. My XO didn't want women on his VBSS team. You know, things like that that....that's the reason you join the Navy. It's not to be sitting on the sidelines doing crap.

(current female SWO)

A few women reported experiences of overt sexual harassment that were reported to the chain of command, which in turn were brushed under the rug. Women do not want to be part of a profession that condones this type of behavior.

I had problems with a lot of sexism, sexual harassment in the chain of command up and down and just like throughout the ship. And when, you know, you try to report it and get support, it kind of gets swept under the carpet, so, you know, I don't want to be involved with that.

(current female SWO)

But I had a horrible chief that would wink at me, suck in his gut, like every time I'd come in...

(lateral female SWO)

These women felt that they were singled out because of their gender.

...I had just got there [to the ship] and like a week later, we had non-observed fit reps. I had a mid-term counseling. Well, I asked all the other guys, ...“Well, did they counsel you on your weight?” I’ve never been overweight or close to that point, but they told me to watch my weight. And they wrote it on there.

(lateral female SWO)

...The division, they were pretty okay but just trying to push their limits because I was a female. I guess it helped build [respect] that I had prior experience so I just didn’t let them push me; I wasn’t a pushover. But, just like that stereotype, you’re a bitch or you’re... So, I was afraid of talking to people, too.

(lateral female SWO)

While the preceding themes emerged from the female participants, the following themes were identified by both the men and the women who participated in the focus groups.

***d. Community Leadership***

The attitudes and disposition of the SWO senior leadership (O-4 and above) influences the morale, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and behaviors of the junior officers. For the participants, the department heads, executive officers (XO), and commanding officers (CO) within the community do not provide a model for junior officers to emulate. Instead, the junior officers see incompetent leadership, leaders who do not respect or care about their subordinates, who micromanage the daily lives of the crew, and who do not want to mentor younger officers.

Some participants believe that the reason for the incompetent senior officers lies in the current Surface Warfare Officer Continuation Pay policy for increasing retention of officers. Instead of choosing the top performers to remain on active duty and improve the community leadership, anyone who accepts SWOCP is allowed to remain on active duty and promote to department head.

And it seems like, to me, the Navy does no, doesn’t do any job of developing what I call as human capital. ... There’s plenty of guys who we know who should be the COs of ships. You can tell, you can find them out when they’re JGs. That guy should be a CO. And how many of those guys do we know got out? And how many of the guys that we say, “Wow. I really hope that guy never gets command” who signs up for SWOCP?



And the Navy seems like, if you're willing to put your name on the paper, we will give you SWOCP. That shouldn't be the criteria—if you're just willing to stick around. That's, that's not the way you run an organization. "Do you want to stay? We'll give you money if you do." ...it should be more than that. It should be, "We've decided that you are someone that we feel is entitled to the SWOCP." And there is none of that. There's no criteria. I don't, I don't want to be around an organization that's run like that. That's why I want to get out.

(current male SWO)

Examples of good leaders and bad leaders were presented by participants during the discussions as a way to compare and contrast their experiences. The bad leaders degraded and humiliated their subordinates in front of peers while the good leaders took the junior officers under their wings to mentor and train them.

The Captain made me climb the main mast when we were underway and called the whole wardroom out to watch when I did not do anything, I did not do anything wrong... And then, you know, speed the ship up so the winds were out of limits. So, it was just the act of power...I don't know if it's the power you feel when you're a Surface Warfare, out here at sea, you're, you know, master of the ship type of thing, or if it's just the fact there are so many, I don't want to say bad, I don't want to say bad people—sub-par, sub-standard, staying in the Surface Warfare Officer Community.

(current female SWO)

...it's that cut throat...its Skinner's rats offering conditioning. If you do the wrong thing, you get the cattle prod. So, instead of learning the right things to do, you learn not to do the wrong things. So, it's, I guess that's one way to learn, you know? But, you were constantly guessing: what is it that the CO wants me to do because you try this, and no that's not it. And now I've got his hot breath in my face. You know, let me try this. No, that's not it either. You know, you want to say, "What do you want?"

(lateral male SWO)

The good leaders respected and trusted their subordinates, while the bad leaders relied on yelling and lower expectations to accomplish a task. Being screamed at, as a junior officer, did not enhance the training/learning of the job, but instead influences the desire to leave the community. The "screamer" leader causes the junior officer to feel unworthy and perpetuates the "eat the young" mentality of the SWO Community.

...there's leadership out there that, yeah, you could get screamed at, but there's a lot of like demeaning leadership out there. .... my perception of the Navy is like, "Why am I being treated like this? I mean, If I do something wrong, you can yell at me." But to demean you and put you down, and, just because he's a CO of a ship. I mean, he has a lot of responsibility but, as a personality trait? I don't know. I don't agree with that.

(current male SWO)

Positive leadership has an impact on the morale and motivation of all onboard the ship. Leaders who actually treat the junior officers/crew with respect gain more productivity. These leaders are the ones who make the decision to leave the community a difficult one.

I think they [good leaders] understand the way... They have a very in-depth understanding of the way the military works. And they know that, "If I don't treat these JOs," ... "with a little bit of respect, like they're actually people and not just," ... "mindless children, then they're not going to want to stay in." ... I mean, if you'd have asked me 6 months into my first tour: "Hell, yeah!—20 years. Not a problem. I can do this." But after that guys switched, after we changed Captains...

(current female SWO)

Some feel that the community leadership does not care about the people in the community, only about promoting themselves. This lack of caring translates into lower morale and lack of motivation to do the best job possible. It is necessary to treat these individuals, the Navy's human capital, with dignity and respect.

I've always wanted to help people, and I felt that I couldn't do that in the SWO community because it was looked down upon. A lot of commanding officers frowned on the enlisted/officer relationship... my commanding officer being one. I just overheard a comment of him saying that, that he really kind of hated the mustang officers because they got too close to the enlisted people. And my thought is that you want your leadership to have a good working relationship with the enlisted person because then you could find out what's going on with their life, and they will be able to perform better. If you can keep things, you know, going rather smoothly in their life or help them when they come across a problem, then they'll be more productive.

(lateral male SWO)

...we had a guy that came into the ward room to talk to the Department head because his, his baby was having eye surgery. And they said, "Well, your wife's at home. So she can take him to the hospital." I'm like, you know, this is... The baby's like a couple weeks old, or a month or two old having eye surgery. And the guy was like, "Well, you're an engineer." Well, it's not an engineering week, but wouldn't really let him take leave at all.

(current female SWO)

Closely linked to the lack of caring and respect for subordinates were the comments about the micromanagement of the sailors' daily lives. Checking up on subordinates to find out what they will be doing over a long weekend or requiring adults to have a curfew was viewed as excessive micromanaging, one participant titled this as "intrusive leadership."

And, a lot of the problems I had was we were treating a lot of these sailors like kids. And they were acting like kids. And that's the whole part, like, I didn't agree about.

(current female SWO)

As adults and members of our armed forces, the participants felt this was not the way to run a professional organization. Sailors should be allowed to have a personal life that is personal.

In no other profession, I think—really, across the board—other than the military are you so involved in your people's lives. And so, just entangled with what they do day-to-day. I mean, with my division, I could have told you everybody's wife or girlfriend's name, their children's names, like straight down to their dog's names. I knew them so well. And I trusted them; and that was okay. But, when it came to the fact that, you know, we were having a three day weekend, and my boss was telling me, ... "Well, what are your guys doing this weekend?" "Well, it's a three day weekend. They're going out, having fun; they'll probably want to watch fireworks, you know, whatever." "Well, I want to know where every single one of them is going; I want to know who they're going to be with. I want..." "Did you want a piss test, too? I mean, because you're going to do that when they get back. Did you want to check before they leave?" I mean, it's this whole, you know, thing that's going on...

(current female SWO)

Additionally, the participating officers felt there are too few leaders in the SWO community who mentor junior officers. Mentoring, some said, is a nonexistent concept; instead, newly commissioned Ensigns are left to their own devices to discover the correct way to accomplish a task.

Well, you don't necessarily see it in other communities, but some senior... And I had really good bosses, and I had really bad bosses, so it's not that I just had a horrible experience. But you just see so many, you know, Lieutenant/Lieutenant Commander SWOs that when you have a new Ensign or JG or younger SWOs, instead of having more of a mentoring philosophy, it's, "Let me beat you down because I got beaten down, and that's just the way it is."

(lateral female SWO)

But just mentoring as a whole, and not speak ill of, of the Department heads. I did have a tremendous Department head on my ship. But the other ones were angry old men. I'm sorry, but they were just angry old men. They didn't mentor, and some of the Divos needed, we all need mentoring. And if they would just get through their anger issues or, "I was treated bad, so I'm going to treat you bad." Or, "I'm just angry for whatever reason." And mentor, the division officers. Don't just be mad at them or let them be somebody else's problem. Sit down and mentor them about the SWO community and what it has to offer.

(lateral female SWO)

According to the focus group participants, more officers would be likely to remain in the SWO Community if they could be assured of working for positive leaders who cared about their subordinates; or, for some, working with their competent peers when they were department heads. However, based on the current system these individuals understand such a guarantee is not possible.

I think it's the top down. The skipper sets the tone. And you know, three months into a deployment everybody's going to be tired; everybody's going to be grumpy and yelling at other people for minor things. But, I think the CO sets the tone. If he's having fun, it spreads. Our, you know, my first commissioned tour on a destroyer, the CO was the type who would come up with a cigar at night and, you know, tell jokes. And I think seeing him always joking, no matter how stressful the situation was, people fed off of it. I mean, he created things like movie night, and, you know, people went there. People had fun. People played games. And no matter how stressful it got, I think he was a direct reflection of the morale of the workers, that one individual.

(lateral male SWO)

If you could guarantee that I would never meet another worthless person, I'm not even saying like another worthless CO or the XO: like, another worthless, like, person who's in charge of me, you know what I mean? I would, I would love this job. It's the people. It only takes one or two people to totally change your mind.

(current female SWO)

*e. Negative Aspects of the Culture*

Culture is defined as the “ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in or to succeeding generations.” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 1997, p. 337) The culture of the SWO community is characterized by a high intensity, stressful job that requires immense dedication from the members. During the focus groups, the culture of the SWO Community was mentioned, and included the leadership, politics/backstabbing, promotion, lack of leave, working hours, the idea that “SWOs eat their young,” and stress.

...it's the sort of culture to be yelled at and figuring it out as you get yelled at, and it's just a miserable life.

(current female SWO)

That's what I'm saying: with a positive culture, I'd have stayed on the ship for 15 years.

(lateral male SWO)

Politics play a huge role in the interactions of personnel aboard a ship, and it is not uncommon for officers to “stab each other in the back” to further their careers. The way to get ahead in the community is to show that you are the best, infallible and can do anything, instead of taking responsibility for your actions if something goes wrong. Junior officers see that finger pointing is acceptable and even encouraged because this is what department heads do.

I had a huge problem with, you know, the department heads serving up division officers on a platter to their Captains. I mean it wasn't so much a problem with...and like, literally we had, what do you call them, like

caricatures of people on their plates with the apple stuck in their mouth and everything.

(current female SWO)

...there's usually on a cruiser, five department heads, including the Sup-O. (He's kind of the outside, but the rest are SWOs.) And it seems like that, 1 of 4 or 2 of 4 or 3 of 4 trying to step on each other's back, just to get that bullet moved to the next rung on the ladder is really a de-motivator. Because what happens [is], and we probably, we receive the brunt of it as JOs, that, well CHENG is mad at OPs. Or the CO is pissed off at so-and-so. So we're like in a little war with combat or engineering or whoever. And the JOs, ..., we're down at the next rung, but, "Well, Ops won't do this for us, so we're going to do this." ... "Hey. We're all on one team here, the last time I checked, trying to make the ship run. Trying to get the ship underway to try to do one thing." .... You do that, you'll be 1 of 4.

(current male SWO)

There are many games that must be played to impress senior officers, even though the opinion is that everyone gets promoted. It is not what you know, but who you impress or kiss up to.

And then they're like, "Okay. Well, we won't agree on this." You know, and then it comes down to it, and there's always one that's ..., "Well, maybe if I sucker up to the XO, I'll get a better fit rep or whatnot." But, I don't think it should really matter because it's 85 percent promotion rate to Lieutenant Commander in the SWO community anyways. So, as long as you have a heartbeat, you're going to Lieutenant Commander.

(current female SWO)

...When the decision is arrived at, it's totally geared toward what the expectation is that the Executive Officer wants to see. And no, no[t] actually driving the problem and presenting the solution to the Executive Officer and saying, "Sir, this is the solution we decided on for this, this and this. I understand why you might be reluctant with it, but this is why we think this is a superior idea." It's all geared toward, you know, "what is, what is he going to want to see," and "Let's try to give him that picture" even if it's the most non-common-sensical, you know, solution to whatever might be going on.

(current male SWO)

I kind of am in the unique position right now where I'm the second SWO division officer, but I'm also a Department head because I'm a navigator. So, I get to see both worlds. And it frustrates me to see some of the

Department heads because they're being competitively ranked against each other. And, we'll sit, and we'll have a discussion. That, "Yeah. We're really ticked off about this. We're going to bring it up to the XO. We're going to do this..." But when it comes down to it, I'm looking around. And I'm like, "Where are you guys?" You know, but I'm the only one that's speaking up because I don't care what, I'm not ranked against these people. I don't, you know, I'm not ranked against anybody right now. And, you know, I, I don't care what my fit rep says.

(current female SWO)

The promotion system has flaws and is not effective; everyone gets promoted so there is no incentive to stand out from your peers. When fitness reports are submitted, bad details or poor performance is omitted so as to not harm the individual later. This zero defect mentality is again perpetuating the belief that the wrong people are promoted to positions of leadership. Instead of being a screening tool, fitness reports are an administrative hurdle that must be accomplished.

I'm a JG, so what they did is they slotted me into the first tour Div-O rankings, that way I came out high on that. And all the JGs came out high because they all ranked us in different, like, little categories. So, we could all be one of something in the end, when there's Second-tour Div-Os on my ships that I would love to wring their necks because they do nothing. I mean, I end up doing their work, which doesn't seem right for some reason. And, so there's no, there's absolutely no incentive for them to do well. If you do crap, you're still going to get promoted. And you're still going to get the glowing evals.

(current female SWO)

I mean, there's no way to sustain this kind of company model with foolish leadership. I mean, you have guys... 90 percent of the time people get promoted based on their time in. You know, that's the only thing that promotes people. And you've got to do something seriously bad to not get promoted. And it's just like, I mean, you really want to participate in that? Where's the, where's the goal? What are you working for?

(current male SWO)

As mentioned in this leadership subsection of this chapter, the SWO culture has perpetuated the idea that the individual sailor is not important, but that his or her work is indispensable. Because the work must be accomplished, taking leave is

frowned upon. The participants mentioned that many SWOs repeatedly carry excess leave because leave is denied or is not even requested because the answer is always “no.”

I’m scared to take leave because I don’t, I don’t. I’m like, I feel bad asking for time off. Knowing that, you know, I don’t want anybody to question it. For some reason, like, I always have to write comments in my leave sheet saying, saying, “I’m going to my wedding.” It’s like “I’m leaving, you know, the very last minute I possibly can. I’m coming right back.” You know. “I’m not even going to kiss the bride. I’m just going to say ‘I do’ and hop on a plane.” You know, “I promise I’ll be back.” I keep waiting for like, “Oh, this would be a good time to take leave because nothing’s going on.” Well, that never happens so...

(current male SWO)

I had a leave chit signed twice, two different times. First it was signed. I was asked to put it in again. And signed again. And then I got reprimanded by the Captain for asking for leave even though I had leave on the books; we were in-port. We’d been underway 280 days that year. It was a stand-down period. But because I was an officer, I wasn’t supposed to take leave.

(current female SWO)

Additionally, as the above paragraph mentioned, the culture perpetuates the view that the sailors and officers are workers only, and there is no concern for their well-being. This idea was also mentioned in the leadership section; leadership and culture are interconnected and are hard to distinguish which is the cause of the other.

...but the Department heads, too, are not only worried about their job, but they’re worried about their future. Because, as a Department head, you’re pretty much locked. You’re going to, you’re going to stay in for a second tour and keep going—I mean, at least the Department heads that I knew. So, the fact that maybe a JO was, you know, a little over stressed or needs a little bit of time, whatever, the Department head doesn’t pull you in and say, “Okay,” you know, “what’s going on? Are you okay at home? And dah dah dah dah dah.” They, I mean, they never asked me that. I mean, even if you were stressed, you’re walking around like a zombie because you got maybe three hours of sleep before you’re, oh that’s right, fourth watch of the day. No. They’re like, “What the hell’s wrong with you? Why aren’t you getting your work done? Dah dah dah dah dah.” I’m just like, “I’m sorry. Let me switch on my machine mode; and I’ll get back to work.”

(current female SWO)



Additional evidence of the lack of caring by the leadership is “desire to make the CO look good” at the expense of the people. Many times the sailors are required to work extra hours on cleaning because a visitor is coming aboard. These extra hours are for everyone, regardless of who really needs to be there; all assigned personnel must come in, officers and enlisted. One could say this is a factor of politics, which the participants mentioned.

I think people, like Captains favoring Department heads, and in that way making it like those JO's don't get a whole lot of exposure, don't get a whole lot of, like she said, boards and, you know, that kind of stuff. The politics in making the Captain happy no matter what—even if it's not the right way to do it; it's the way he wants it to be done, so that's how you have to do it. Political in that, you know, someone's coming onboard on a Saturday to view the ship. Well, the Captain wants to make a good impression. So, everybody has to come in on Saturday even though we cleaned the ship top to bottom Wednesday through Friday for, you know, this dignitary or this special person that comes in.

(current female SWO)

The idea of SWOs “eating their young” was discussed in the context of both leadership and culture. The community “eats their young” by placing undue stress and requirements on the new officers. The ones who can survive the stress of long hours are the ones who promote to commanding officer. But, the ones who survive are not always the best officers, only the ones who have the ability to let things roll off their backs. For the participants, subjecting themselves to the stress of department head tours is not worth the reward—command at sea.

...is how Surface Warfare Officers eat their young; and it's this Darwin, Darwinian environment in which you, you've got to put up with the crap to survive, you know, the ones who finally make it to be the CO of a ship are the ones who have consistently put up with the horrible conditions—and it's almost like that's your reward. You know, you spend two tours of as a Div. O. getting just inundated with knowledge; your department head tours are more, you know, I don't even know a proper term, a politically correct term for it. It's just a lot of baptism by fire. You, they want to see what you can handle.

(lateral male SWO)

There was so much that was demanded of you, you know, that it just wouldn't... Once I realized, you know, it can't all get done, you know, even if I get to the ship when it's dark and leave when it's dark, I can't get it all done. And I started prioritizing things on how much I would get yelled at if it didn't get done. And the things I would just get yelled at a little bit, or, you know, a dirty look. Those got down to the bottom. And I was like, "Oh, I'll really get yelled at if I don't get this one..." That one was the first one I did.

(current male SWO)

*f. Lack of Passion for Driving and Commanding a Ship*

...I didn't really know what I was signing up for, I think. I was a junior in high school. And, you know, it was six years removed and...But I, you know, I also, I don't want to say I had a terrible experience on my ship because I enjoyed some of the work. And I enjoyed being an engineer and the job I do now. It's just, I'm not, I'm not a 'haze gray,' you know.

(current female SWO)

Both males and females expressed the necessity for SWOs to have the passion and desire to remain on a ship, whether as a department head or as a Commanding Officer (CO). Many of the participants stated they did not have the desire to be a CO of a ship. They could not see themselves enjoying the hours and stress of running an entire ship or even a department.

You know, being DCA, I'm on the path to be a CHENG. I don't want to be a CHENG, plain and simple. I have no other choice. They're not going to make me an Ops. I'm just going to... no desire to do it whatsoever.

(current male SWO)

I think in order to be a good Captain, and not necessarily as a reflection of the ones I've had (I don't think they had this goal). But I think you have to have the fire for command at sea in order to be Department head, a good XO, and a good Captain. And some people just don't necessarily want that responsibility. Like you're talking about training. They're like, "Ah... I don't know." They want to be Captain, but they're just like, "Oh, crap. I have to be in charge of the ship, and driving it?" You know, but, and I think those people make the best Captains. That, you know, really love ship-driving, love being at sea.

(current female SWO)

Enjoying the job is important to maintaining the enthusiasm necessary to be effective.

...Command at sea...it doesn't light me on fire. ...And what I definitely don't want to do is take a ship to sea and be up like all times of the night and sleep one hour a day. It just, it looks really miserable to me, to be honest with you. Yeah, it's great. "I'm the CO of a cruiser/destroyer, whatever." But, it doesn't really light my hair on fire.

(current male SWO)

***g. Inability to Achieve Work/life Balance***

All active duty participants discussed the dissatisfaction with their work/life balance. Work/life balance can be described as the time spent engaging in home life activities and the time spent at work. Each of the participants agreed the number of hours spent onboard the ship (including duty) is disproportionate to the number of hours spent off the ship. This lack of personal time precludes quality family time, developing personal relationships or outside interests, and missing family events.

Although deployments take away from the work/life balance, this is not the primary issue. The primary issue is the lack of a work/life balance while in-port. Participants disliked the requirements for training, work-ups, or just the in-port and out-of-port tasks that seemed to have no purpose. Some mentioned the dissatisfaction with not having two days off in a row (on a weekend). While not underway, excessive time is spent on the ship because of duty days.

I'm out to sea Monday through Friday. I really don't mind. I don't care, like you said, going out to sea Monday through Friday. I come home. I have the weekends. But when you're on a ship and you go out to sea Monday through Friday, you guys forget about duty. And we have duty and then your duty days fall on Friday. And the next weekend it's Saturday. And the next weekend it's Sunday. And you haven't had a weekend off in a month. And that kills you, because when you have duty Saturday, you don't have a weekend. Because you come in Saturday; you leave Sunday. You don't have a day, two days off. And that's, so when you go out to sea Monday through Friday, it's not going to sea Monday through Friday because it's coupled with the duty.

(male current SWO)

Just—not particularly working hours; it’s fine to work late, but you should at least, you know, it’d be nice to get two days off a week. And, you know, and when you go several months without having two days off a week, it’s kind of, kind of hard on a family or just even on an individual, even the single people it was really hard on.

(lateral female SWO)

One participant discussed the idea of not being home even though it was the period right before deployment. He had only spent 10 days in-port in the last three months.

I don’t want to be on Surface ships forever doing this. I want to go do something that I enjoy. And I have kids. I want to be around the kids I have. I mean they’re getting bigger. And we’re getting ready to deploy... In between the deployment cycle right now is, it’s brutal. We just spent 10 days in-port since the beginning of September. And this is supposed to be the time that we’re back over here, not doing anything.

(male current SWO)

The number of hours required while in-port is a huge burden on their mental health; an active social life is limited because of the operational tempo (ship schedule and surge capacity). Individuals spend long hours on board the ship while in-port, precluding meeting someone to date or, if married, to spend quality family time.

But even in situations, where this happened a couple of times, I’ve been seeing somebody for three or four months. It’s like, “Okay. Well, I’m going to leave for six.” You know, where does that leave you? It kind of screws everything up.

(male current SWO)

And when I came home, if it was 8 o’clock, the kids were about crawling into bed, and I was so dog tired that I crawled into bed myself. So I don’t know that it was quality time—quality time I probably got maybe once a week with the family.

(lateral male SWO)

Although most officers understand the requirement for long hours underway, the current surge capacity requires substantial deployment time. The officers miss out on many events in the family that can never be repeated and for this reason they left or are planning on leaving the community. Men, as well as women, do not want to

miss out on their children growing up. In the SWO Community this is inevitable because of the amount of time away from home, both in-port and underway.

I think right now my number one reason would be I'm getting along to the age where if I wanted to start a family I think that I'd be putting my family through too much strain with deployments, and even just work-up cycles. When you're in San Diego, but you're not in San Diego... I just don't... I was a legal officer, and, you know, I did so much divorce paperwork for people that, you know, it just kind of opened my eyes that this is not a way to raise a family.

(male current SWO)

OPTEMPO also precludes developing outside interests or participating in self-improvement activities.

It was a very job-intensive lifestyle at the exclusion of family, at the exclusion of even outside interests for some single guys who didn't have families. ...And you say, "Boy, you know, this is, this is a lifestyle that is very specific to somebody who, you know, loves the ocean and doesn't quite mind that they're not seeing the full extent of their children growing up ..."

(lateral male SWO)

...Between the single guys and the married guys, we had different interests. When I was off duty, I'd rather be spending time with my family. ...But the single guys...they had hobbies as many hobbies as there are people. But, you know, so, one of them loved to surf, you know, thinking, "I don't ever get to surf because I'm always on board here. When I get off work, it's too dark. You know, I can't go. And on the weekends, we have duty or preparing for [an] Admiral to come by." I think it ate into the quality of their life. They weren't able to better themselves on a personal level.

The SWO Community, as the Navy in general, desires officers who are well rounded, educated, and continue to try to better themselves. Additional education is not possible while onboard a ship due to the working hours despite the community encouraging individuals to pursue higher education.

... he [department head] kind of discouraged distance learning because he wanted everyone's effort and focus to be on the ship. And when I got there, I didn't do a thing with the course, even though it was my intention to finish the course. I just got an incomplete and never did finish it.

(lateral male SWO)

Regardless of whether the officer is married or single, issues surrounding the balance are at the top of the list for leaving the SWO Community. This repeated in and out of port frequently and without notice causes challenges to planning and the scheduling of normal life events.

I didn't feel like I was \*\*\* because I didn't have friends outside the Navy. I didn't have a community; I couldn't go to church; I couldn't volunteer; I couldn't do all these things that complete me as a person. I became SWO \*\*\* and nothing else. I didn't want to be that person. So that was my main reason why I got out of the SWO community is because I'm more than a SWO.

(lateral female SWO)

Aside from the hours worked, the continually changing schedule and the requirements for surge readiness are taking a toll on individuals. For many, the lack of a set schedule precludes planning special events such as vacations, family visits or even weddings.

I think scheduling is a big problem. When you're on a ship, you don't know what your schedule is going to be from week to week or month. You can't plan vacation. In fact, you're not really even... It's kind of frowned upon to take leave. Most people leave ships with like days and days stored up because they just don't have enough time, and the schedule of the ship doesn't permit them to take leave. So, you don't see your family for a couple years.

(current female SWO)

The not-deployment parts, you don't really, you can't really call it in-port because I remember the three months before I went on deployment, I was out three and one-half weeks of the month for the last three months. And, you know, the six months is just all in one big shot. But the in-port periods are when it's, it's a very volatile scheduling process; you know, it changes every week.

(male current SWO)

*h. Excessive Work Hours*

The number of hours required of a SWO was continually discussed and fits in many categories. One can look at the number of hours as a function of the culture, work/life balance, or as a necessity of getting a ship underway in top shape. With this said, the lateral SWOs who participated in the focus groups did not believe all the hours worked are necessary.

Deployments were not a significant dissatisfier. While on deployment these officers understood the long hours and actually felt they were accomplishing something worthwhile, that, for the most part, was part of a plan. Putting the training received to work while on deployment visiting other ports was the reason for joining the Navy.

I enjoyed my two deployments. And during deployment, you know, for the most part, you actually feel more of a sense of fulfillment and “Hey, this is what I’m training to do.” You know, and “Let’s, let’s get it done.”

(current male SWO)

And, you know, we were steam[ing] around in the South China sea for absolutely no purpose for, all through the holidays doing nothing. But I am grateful that, you know, we were out there when the tsunami hit because that is the most, you know, besides my deployment on the bridge, which, I felt that was worthwhile in the Gulf. But, in the \*\*\*, the most meaningful thing I, you know, I’ve done the entire time, in 18 months was help out, was contribute to that relief.

(current female SWO)

Extra jobs and collateral duties are required of all officers and add to the number of hours being worked by all officers within the SWO community. Some of these officers, however, felt, the extra hours worked are all for naught. In fact, the hours were just because they are a longstanding part of the culture.

In my experience, morale has been a very big factor in how well people perform on the job. And, if people aren’t happy, you know, with their personal life or even outside getting enough time...Because, I mean, there were times when I had to keep, I had to keep my division until 6 o’clock at night even though we had no more work to do...But, because it looks bad for us to leave before 6, they had to stay.

(current female SWO)

This area seems ridiculous to the officers—it implies a lack of trust and respect for their abilities as officers. Additionally, the necessity to work for the sake of working decreases morale and the desire to remain in the SWO Community. The officers feel that allowing them to manage their divisions, complete the work and then allow the crew to leave the ship will make everyone happier and more productive. Keeping individuals onboard for busy work leads to lower productivity and unhappiness.

Instead of saying, “Get X X X done and you can leave.” And I think the problem is, a lot of people, it’s just the mentality. Like, “Well, it’s going to take all day to do this.” No it’s not, because you know, if you give a group of guys a task, and you say, “If you get this done, you can leave, they’re going to find the most efficient way to get it done.” If you say, “Get this task done. Even if you get it done, you’ll be here until 4.”

(male current SWO)

What the motivator was on the \*\*\* was that you knew that if you got everything done, you were done. And it wasn’t like, “Okay, we got our work done but we can’t leave yet because the XO is still here. And if he sees me crossing the bow, then that looks bad.”

(lateral male SWO)

I mean, you pull in to port and you’re like, “Yes. We’re going to get some time off.” And the next thing you know, it’s like, “Oh. The ship isn’t clean enough.” Or, “An Admiral is coming by, so we have to clean even more.” Or, “We have an inspection.” Even when it’s not your department that has an inspection, the whole ship has to stay because it looks bad if one department lets their, lets their department go before another department. ...And as a Division officer, the last thing you want to do is make your people stay on board the ship if they don’t, if there’s no work to do. I mean, nobody wants to do that.

(lateral female SWO)

The idea of planning is foreign to the community. Officers feel that what they did all day was to put out fires. Better and more planning could reduce some of the stress and hectic lifestyle of the community.

You know, you’d go to quarters in the morning. And you’d get a list of things to do. And this list of things was, you know, a substantial list. So you’d start working on the first thing. Then all the sudden, they change the schedule. And they’d say, “Hey, we have an emergency meeting on the mess decks about X. So, you’d go down there, and you’d screw around for



an hour, and then you'd go back and try to get back into whatever it was you were going to do. And then, invariably, then it'd be time to eat—for your crew, anyway. And so you had to start letting them go. It almost, it almost seemed like everything got pushed back to about 3 p.m. And then all of the sudden, your boss is coming and saying, "Hey, remember that list that I gave you this morning? How much of it do you have done?" You say, "Well, we really only got done the first item." "Well, nobody's going home until the list is done."

(lateral male SWO)

It is important to note, however, these junior officers noticed the number of hours required of department heads and how unhappy they were with their life. In fact, the hours required were worse than what the division officers already were working. And, the realization this was what life would be like if they remained a SWO was not appealing. One officer mentioned it was like walking out in front of a bus.

Another officer discussed the fact that if he remained a SWO he would need to dedicate his life to the ship. Being this dedicated was acceptable when he was in his twenties, but as he got older and began to think of a family, a department head tour was not appealing.

And I had great experiences; I had great COs. All of my COs pushed me; you know, they encouraged me. I was usually the Number 1 Divo. And I didn't have a problem—I was like the go-to person. But that was okay, being that I was in my early/mid-twenties. It was okay because I didn't have to worry about going home to take care of anybody. But as I saw more and more, I would see the Department heads that would spend all of their time on the ship; they would basically live there because they felt that if they left early, they would be looked on as a bad Department head. And I knew that I didn't want to dedicate my life just to a ship.

(lateral female SWO)

And once I was in the SWO community, I did enjoy my time at sea. I had a good, a great time out at sea. I loved being First Lt. I loved being in it, the action, everything. But I'm actually a very stressed, anxious person. I kind of have anxiety problems. And as SWO, your work is never done. And I found myself turning into a different person who I didn't want to become as a SWO. Because I would pack 30 hours into a 24-hour day. I would stay, as a division officer, I would stay 'til the work was done, and your work was never done. So, you can imagine how stressful that was.

(lateral female SWO)

*i. Mundane Nature of Some Tasks*

The participants discussed the fact that some aspects of the jobs are routine, boring, repetitive, lack intellectual stimulation, and a purpose. Additionally, the participants felt that some job dissatisfaction comes from the fact that the community does not plan and must redo jobs that have already been done.

One officer felt that anyone could do the job she does. She is not challenged intellectually; she only has to figure out how to manipulate people.

Anyone with half a brain, maybe, and wearing bars could do that. You know, and I don't feel challenged intellectually at all—maybe to like figure out to manipulate people, to like get them to do, you know, what you want them to do without really doing that.

(current female SWO)

I don't find any interest in that, and standing watch gets kind of boring as well, so... You know, you're standing up there for 5 hours, and all you're looking at is ocean line. And then, you know, it's just, it's not that interesting to me anymore. I mean, I'm glad I did it.

(current female SWO)

The paperwork required of division officers is a burden that could be lessened. Often paperwork is a nightmare that causes many revisions and personal chops from the chain of command.

And the admin burden is tremendous. It is... It takes up so much time. And I spent some time on a British ship during Iraqi Freedom we did, as sort of a combat-systems liaison officer with the American combat-systems. And I would just kind of keep them involved with how the American ships were operating. And I watched them. And they do 20 percent of the admin that we do in our Navy. And, probably, at the end of the day, got about 80 percent as much done as the American Navy does. So, for that extra, you know, 80 percent of admin we do, we only gain about 20 percent of production, it seems like.

(current male SWO)

Additionally, tasks assigned to officers are often below their educational level, and do not provide any self-worth. Day after day the tasks are the same, could be done by anyone, and have no option for innovation.

You're never really asked to use your brain. You're just asked to complete paperwork. And, any, like you said, any well-trained monkey can execute said task. And you're sitting there, especially when, I mean, I have two Master's degrees. Like two. And they sit on my desk. And I look at them at night, and I'm like, "You know, at some point, I was actually pretty good at something and like, somebody asked me what I thought about something." But now, it's like, nobody cares what I think. They only care that I can type pretty fast and pull information together and put it on a sheet of paper.

(current female SWO)

All participants expressed the satisfaction of having served the United States as a Naval Officer; however, they have become bored with the routine and lack of stimulation. They are choosing to leave the SWO Community for a more challenging opportunity in a career that will allow them to feel they are reaching their self-worth.

I don't hate the job, but I don't love the job. I don't find it all that interesting anymore, you know. Driving ships and stuff like that is fun, but when you're dealing with all the paperwork. I feel like a paper-pusher, especially as a training officer. All I do is sit on the computer and play with Excel—all day long.

(current female SWO)

While deployments are satisfying and seem to have an overall plan, tasks within-port do not follow the same pattern. The tasks assigned while in-port seem to be without an obvious direction, to extinguish a fire, or off-the-cuff. Once again, both males and females found there is a lack of planning and communication within the community. The lack of a plan causes extra work and extreme stress to accomplish a task in a short period of time.

All this self-inflicted stuff, where, no matter how much you try to make it sound better, everybody knows (including yourself) that you're just BS-ing them. You know, that the only reason why we're here at 1900 tonight is because somebody thought it'd be a good idea; this had to get done.

(current female SWO)

I have trouble working a full day when a lot of the work that we do is work that we're doing again. We're doing work twice, or doing something for the third time. I know, right now, our engineers are coming in seven days a week working 'til 1900. Reason being? We're fixing discrepancies

that the shipyard didn't do properly. So, we're essentially doing work for the second time. And they're working a full day. I mean, they're working until 1900 doing work that was supposed to be already done. And at sea, that's the culture of, "Okay. Do it half-ass the first time. Do it again the right way. Maybe do it again the third time to prove that you did it."

(current male SWO)

It seems that junior officers are not allowed to assume increased responsibilities unless they are a favorite of the department head or commanding officer. When this occurs, these individuals continually get the good job, which does not allow others to try their hand.

Like I could not be more miserable on my ship in my job.. And then I came to \*\*\*, you know, working on shore tour. I extended here for two more years because it's a good job. Like, you work normal hours. You have people that treat you with respect. You know, you don't have people yelling at you all the time sending you around doing inane tasks. Like, I actually feel like I have a job now instead of I'm just some department head's "do" boy on my ship. And it's just, I don't know, it's a measure of self-respect, too, I feel like.

(current male SWO)

Of the 28 current SWOs who participated in the study, six are requesting a lateral transfer to a different community within the Navy. These officers were queried about the reasons for transferring.

**3. Why are you requesting a lateral transfer? Why are you not requesting a lateral transfer?**

For these individuals, they love the Navy and have a desire to continue serving the United States, but do not enjoy the SWO community, and they hope another community will be a better fit.

I like the Navy. I'm going to go career where I become the surgeon general, or I don't know, they have this new area of foreign officer thing that came out. I just know I want to stay in. But, Surface Warfare has a long way to go with, like the wrong kind of improvements if they want any hope in keeping female retention going...

(current female SWO)

If I never had to go to sea again, I would stay in forever. I don't mind the uniform; I don't mind the hours. I don't mind, I mean, yeah, I mind some

of it eventually I could find something, but I wouldn't have to leave my family.

(current female SWO)

Five officers said they had not decided if they will leave the Navy or transfer to another community. They were asked: **Why are you not requesting a lateral transfer?** These individuals had not ruled out the possibility of transferring to another community. For many, however, they are unsure of what options are available. Other community options are not advertised by the SWO Community. However, the SWO community was promoted as the easiest way to get the community of interest.

I looked at JAG core a little bit. And I may yet do that. I'll see how things go on shore duty. So, I would say my priority, I would definitely put my priority, my number one priority is getting out of the SWO community before getting out of the Navy. But at this point, my, I'm kind of eager to have the, explore the civilian, you know, workforce.

(current male SWO)

Fifteen of the participants had made lateral moves into other Navy communities such as Information Professional and Human Resources. These individuals were asked about the reasons they decided to move to another community.

#### **4. Why did you transfer to another community?**

The following themes emerged from both the male and female offices. The participating officers all enjoy being a part of the Navy. For them, transferring to a different community allows them to remain a part of the Navy, but in a community that fits into their career plans and lifestyle.

I love the Navy. I like being underway; I seriously love going out to sea. It gets tiresome; it gets boring sometimes, but overall I like going. That's why I went IP because half of our billets are sea-going billets.

(lateral male SWO)

##### **a. SWO Not First Choice**

The requirement of choosing an unrestricted community leaves some individuals joining a community that from the beginning did not fit their goals. These individuals realized either before choosing SWO or soon after joining the community,

this was not for them; but, the SWO community is the quickest way to get to another community.

I left the SWO community because I was communications officer my first tour. That was my background prior to joining the Navy. And I love computers, and that just happened to be the time when the IP community was born, came out, whatever. And so I figured that would be the best, the best route for me to take. So, I applied and made it into the IP community.

(lateral male SWO)

***b. More Time with Family***

Individuals chose to lateral because other communities allow them to spend time with family by not deploying. The number of work-hours may be intense, but each night there is the ability to go home or to see family.

If I never had to go to sea again, I would stay in forever. I don't mind the uniform; I don't mind the hours. ... but I wouldn't have to leave my family.

***c. Culture of Other Community***

From the outside, the cultures of the other communities look more appealing than the culture of the SWO Community. Respect from community members, quality of life, and shorter working hours are appealing factors that lead individuals to choose a restricted line community.

The IP community, we're a sea-based community. But in terms of arduous duty, I don't think the sea duty or the life of IPs is nearly as tough and as hard on our family life and our personal life as it is on the SWOs. You see the average SWO that's 40 years old looks 50 or 60. The average IP that's 40, you think they're 30. So different work environment and a different work, just the timing or lengthened—instead of 16-hour days, it's a normal 8- or 10-hour day for IPs.

(lateral male SWO)

For one woman, the idea of having a job listing is appealing. Although she will still need to use the detailer system, the community is more user friendly.

There's a roster in the METOC community that lists all the jobs you can have. And, it's not that easy to pick your job. There's still a detailer, and it's still a process, but you have an idea of where you can go and what you

can do and what you want to do. And, so that, that was a big thing. I really liked that aspect of a smaller community.

(lateral female SWO)

Six of the study participants were women who had taken lateral transfers. One theme emerged that was particular to the women only.

***d. Gender Differences: Career Planning Flexibility***

Female officers expressed the flexibility of career planning in other communities such as Information Professional and Meteorology Officer. These communities seem to expect changes in career milestones because of family planning issues. The option of planning a family on your own schedule instead of the Navy schedule was seen as a tremendous benefit for retaining women in the Navy.

Like I talked to the detailer before (I'm pregnant now) you know, before I got pregnant I talked to the detailer and said, "Hey. I'm interested in having children. When should I do this in my career?"... "This is a great place to have children, but if it were at a different time..." She seemed a lot more flexible about children.

(lateral female SWO)

...I did a lot of training and manpower on the ship, I figured that the HR community would be good for me in that sense, and I would have the option of going to sea later on if I decided to have kids or decided not to. But I felt like the HR community gave me that option.

(lateral female SWO)

After the participants talked about their reasons for leaving the SWO community they were asked to explore options that might have caused them to stay in the community. All of the options were discussed with both male and female participants.

**5. What would keep you as a SWO?**

The answers to this question were as varied as the participants. However, it is apparent that no one solution or incentive will solve the retention problem. For many, one incentive would not change the decision to leave the community, but a combination of options might increase their propensity to stay.

Initially, participants were asked what would keep you a SWO. Based on the responses, additional ideas were posed by the facilitator. Although the facilitator did

interject ideas, no definitive answers emerged that would keep individuals in the community. The options discussed by the 28 participants follow.

*a. Sabbaticals/Leave*

Sabbaticals are an option that women see as possibly improving the retention of females. The men seemed to agree that sabbaticals would be ideal for women to use in family-planning. When asked about a compensated sabbatical for traveling or other purposes, most agree that it would not improve retention. Instead, it might lose more people. Rather than take a sabbatical, participants would like to be able to take the leave they have earned.

Both women and men pointed out the drawbacks to sabbaticals. A sabbatical would be delaying the inevitable—returning to a department head tour. The pain of these department head tours would be waiting in the wings. More women than men thought this would not be a benefit because skills would degrade during the sabbatical and individuals would require training when reentering the Navy—degradation not only of SWO skills, but the jargon of the military.

...Six months off or a year off just really doesn't do anything. It's just, sends you right back to the same crappy job or the same job you absolutely love, but it was important that you needed a break. I don't see how that would affect SWO retention anymore than it would affect Navy retention or any other company.

(lateral male SWO)

Also, a sabbatical would allow one to see the alternatives available in the civilian community and could actually lower retention if officers saw other employment options.

But to say, like, "If I take a year off, and then I'm committed to come back." What good is that year going to do? If I go out and find that I'm totally into something else, and I found something else that I want to spend the rest of my life doing, well, I'm stuck knowing that I have to spend 2 years or whatever the rest of my commitment would be back in the Navy. If there was some way to say, "Okay. You can get out; you can do what you want. And you'd have this much time. If you'd like to come back, you will be able to come back as the same rank you left, the same pay-grade, whatever. If not, good luck to you and do whatever you want."

(current female SWO)



It's almost like you'd be starting a new life. I mean, if you're gone for a year, I mean, more than likely, most people would start a job, you know, start doing other things and get other interests. And the interest in the Navy would decrease.

(lateral male SWO)

For the men and women, allowing leave to be taken on a regular basis would be an improvement in the community. The inability to take leave lowers the morale and productivity of officers. As noted in the culture subsection, leave is only offered in specific leave periods and then, frequently, officers are not allowed to take leave for the entire period. An improvement would be to allow officers to take leave when they desired.

If I could take leave when I want to take leave and not at Christmas and post-deployment and some, some small periods during the summer, it would make it more favorable for me to stay as a SWO.

(lateral male SWO)

***b. SWOCP***

None of the officers who participated believed that increasing SWOCP would improve the retention of the community. Money in exchange for a lifestyle was not seen as a fair trade-off. Some of the lateral SWOs felt that the incentive pay would need to be between \$100,000 to one million per year to keep them in the community. The 28 officers who have not accepted SWOCP said no amount of money would keep them as a SWO.

They could take SWOCP and double it. It wouldn't keep me around. It's not the money. It's the job satisfaction.

(current male SWO)

It's tempting to stay in, but then I looked at the, the monetary, the...just the life of a SWO and I just...It just wasn't worth it.

(lateral female SWO)

I'm not getting paid anymore as an IP as I was a SWO. I was getting paid more as a SWO, actually. So that just goes to show you: it's not the money that's involved, it's the job satisfaction.

(lateral male SWO)

Fifteen participants expressed the opinion that SWOCP is not curing the retention problem, but is hindering the improvement by keeping the wrong people.

**c. *Guaranteed Lateral Transfer***

A guaranteed lateral transfer to a restricted line community after completion of the required department head tour was mentioned as a possible option.

"Hey. I need three more years, and I'll give you a bonus, and then you can do what you want." I would have said "yes."

(lateral female SWO)

...Once you're in the department head level, a lateral transfer really seems kind of like they're not going to let you [lateral] because they have... their hooks into you. To me, if you could do your department head tours and still have an option within the Navy, I think that might help attract some people.

(lateral male SWO)

**d. *Career Flexibility***

Allowing an officer career flexibility in planning their career path is appealing. Not all officers have the passion or desire to command a ship, but the current SWO career path requires all community members to follow the same path. For some, they would rather maintain their current level of responsibility and job taskings, i.e. a division officer working with sailors or as a Navigator.

If I could have been a communications guy or a network engineer, I probably would have stayed.

(lateral male SWO)

I love the amphib Navy. I don't see why ...Navy's not going to give me control of my career. They're going to say, "Now you need to go to a that ship." I want nothing to do with Tomahawk missiles. I'm not interested in it; I think it's boring. I don't want to sit behind a carrier for three months in the Gulf. I want to put Marines on the beach. I want to play with

HELOs. That's what I want to do. And the Navy won't let me do that. And they're going to say, "No. You need to do an AEGIS tour." I don't want to do an AEGIS tour. I don't like AEGIS.

(current male SWO)

I don't mind going to sea—I mean, I don't like being away from my family any more than the next guy, but you deal with it. To me, I'd rather, if you just take me down to the engine room, in the middle of all those big machines that make noise and, you know, smell bad. I guess, I like that kind of stuff, ...I don't want to sit up, the bridge is okay. But, I could care less about sitting in combat, talking to five other ships in this little, you know, political kind of game where, you know, this Commander said this. Well, it's really stupid.

(lateral male SWO)

One idea that emerged from both the men and women was to institute a platform or department career path. A career path of this type would allow those who desired to be a CO to continue along that track, while others may follow a technical track. In the same vein, developing a platform career path could improve the proficiency of the SWO Community by driving one type of ship and improving morale and competency of the community at the same time. This would be similar to the aviation community.

And we're ship-drivers. I mean, being a SWO, your primary job is to drive ship. So, how the hell are we supposed to be good at driving ships if we're on a frigate one day and an LSD the next day, and then we do Department head on a Cruiser? How are we ever supposed to learn how to drive a ship?

(current female SWO)

An additional idea suggested by participants was to cancel the requirement to complete two department head tours. For many, the thought of the department head tour is a demotivator because of the hours and stress involved in the job.

#### *e. Change in Culture/Leadership*

The culture plays one of the largest roles in the decision to leave the community for both men and women. People need to believe the leadership cares and respects them. Without this, they are only a body.

I think even more important than that is you need a change from the top-down the attitude and the culture of the communities. ...So you're not just

a body. “We care about you. We’re devoted to you. What can we do? How can we engage you? How can we challenge you? What do you want from this? Like, how can we make this good for you?”

(lateral male SWO)

As the leadership could fit in this category, selecting the right individuals to remain in the Navy was the biggest suggestion from the focus groups. To select the right individuals, fitness reports would need to be used as intended—evaluate officers on their abilities and weaknesses. This information would then be used to select individuals that would make a positive influence on the community.

...If you stop opening the flood-gates and letting SWOs into the community. If you close the gates and say, “You’re not getting in because you’re going to have to fight to get into this community. We’re not giving you any extra money because people like being here. We don’t have to.”

(lateral male SWO)

...Even though you think that you are a good performer, you’re with the pack or above the pack, there are so many career killers, opportunities to kill your career in the Surface community, I think vice the HR community or other staff or restricted-line communities, that you have so much invested interest in your career that the longer and further along you get, that when you get to be CO or skipper of the ship, you’re more thinking about your career than thinking about your people or having fun. And I think that’s one of the reasons why you get a lot of skippers that create these negative atmospheres for their people. And, if that could ever end, I’d be very happy. And I could have probably stayed in.

(lateral male SWO)

*f. Planning/Scheduling*

The lack of certainty in ship’s schedules is causing many problems in the personal lives of SWOs. Current Operational Tempo impedes the certainty of an in-port period. The current “surge readiness” prohibits individuals from planning personal events.

And the other thing was, and I know this will never happen, but some type of plan for the ships. I mean, I’m not saying go back to whatever was out for 6, in for 24, I’m not saying necessarily do that. But I am saying there, there should be able to be some sort of set deployment schedule. And in

between that deployment schedule, there should...be set times when a ship is getting underway.

(current female SWO)

Also, the uncertainty of normal working hours causes issues in planning a normal personal life. The numbers of hours are unreasonable compared to what is available in the civilian community.

If there was set hours, and I knew I was going to be home everyday at 4 or 5, you know, coming in at 6. That'd be great, that'd be great.

(current female SWO)

The number of hours SWOs are required to work is daunting. Reducing the operational tempo would lessen the stress of the officers in the community and allow for a quasi-normal lifestyle. Reduced hours would allow for officers to develop outside interests, pursue educational opportunities, self-improvement, and spend time with family or developing a potential family.

...Lengthen the time that people spend on ships, and reduce the Op-tempo. ...if you increase their tour length, after a while, I think that they develop more proficiencies on the ship, being more comfortable with the ship even though they don't have the same amount of Op-tempo when days underway away from home-port. "Cut Op-tempo. Increase tour lengths slightly."

(lateral male SWO)

#### ***g. Geographic Stability***

Geographic stability would allow the family to develop ties to the community. Community ties benefit the officer and family in lowering stress during deployments by knowing the family is taken care of and know where to go when there is a problem.

I think if you realized that you could lay some roots, you know, because a lot of the thing was we were still getting established in a neighborhood in Jacksonville. And a lot of that was, was difficult for me in a number of ways. I'd come home, and you really wouldn't know your neighbors, you know.

(lateral male SWO)

Only one male officer said that geographic stability would ensure that he remained in the community.

...geographic stability would help me a lot. Let me just say, as single-tons that have enough trouble as it is. You know, I'm not married; I'm not engaged, but I struck up a good relationship there in the Northwest, and then I got lucky, I ended up in San Diego.

(current female SWO)

However, there is a concern about how geographic stability would impact promotion opportunities, i.e. how promotion boards would view a member's decision to remain in one area for an extended period of time.

***h. Guaranteed Graduate Education***

The appeal of this incentive was very low because the belief is that everyone gets it anyway. Two women felt attending a civilian institution might make the difference in remaining a SWO.

Not for me, but I think it would for other people, you know, just that educational benefit as far as your professional (and personal) and educational growth, to go where you want. Something different, some kind of perk for giving so much of your time and your life and the dedication. It's time for a little me-time, and I think that promise to have me-time after.

(lateral female SWO)

**C. FORMER SWOS WHO HAVE LEFT ACTIVE DUTY**

Telephone interviews were conducted with six separated SWOs. These individuals earned their SWO pins and chose to leave active duty after completing their minimum service obligations. Table 6 provides a description of these individuals.

**Table 6. Demographic Description of Prior Active Duty SWOs**

Gender	Year Group	Left Active Duty	Lateral Prior to Leaving Active Duty	Currently drilling reservist	Accession Source
Male	1999	Oct 2005	No	Yes	NROTC
Male	1998	Sept 2004	No	Yes	NROTC
Female	1997	Oct 2004	No	No	Naval Academy
Female	2000	July 2005	Yes	Yes	Naval Academy

Female	2000	Nov 2005	Unknown	Yes	Naval Academy
Female	2000	Aug 2005	No	No	Naval Academy

Source: Author

Leaving active duty was not an easy choice for any of these individuals. All enjoyed their time in the Navy, but were ready to move onto something else.

# **1. Why did you leave the SWO community?**

## ***a. Family***

Family interaction is an important aspect of life for three of the four participating females and one of two participating males. The SWO lifestyle did not allow for the interactions to occur on a regular basis because of the work hours and deployment schedule.

The primary reason for leaving the community was, was that I, I just didn't have enough time with my family—specifically my wife. I recently got married. Or, I got, I got married in 2003, and I wanted to devote more time to my wife and my family or, you know, possibly starting a family. And I just couldn't do that in the Surface community.

(separated male SWO)

Since 9/11, the Navy has shifted to a surge mentality that requires ships to be ready to deploy on short notice. This change in routine reduced the family interactions even further.

I want to be with my kids. I want to be around my family. And I don't want to always be deployed, or even have the possibility of being deployed. And so, you're just always kind of walking on egg shells because you don't know if it's going to happen. And with this whole new surge ready type of how they're going to be cycling the deployments, it was more possible that I'd be always out at sea.

(separated female SWO)

## ***b. No Passion***

Similar to the other categories of SWOs, the separated SWOs believe there must be a passion for remaining a SWO and promoting to commanding officer.

...The subject-matter ...I did not find fulfilling or stimulating. I would say, my catchphrase was I just didn't care about the latest and greatest missile and strategy and Pentagon. And, you know, the higher I got, the farther away I was going to get from what I did like about the Navy. And it was just, the small unit, the shipboard adventures (if you can call them that). But, I just didn't like the subject matter. I didn't care about making war.

(separated female SWO)

"My days are wasting away staring at the water." I felt like, you know, we were doing Intel Ops off the, the horn of Africa. And I just sat there staring at the water for days on end. I just felt like my time and life was just wasting away—I could be doing something else better in my life. It'd be better spent instead of just staring at the water.

(separated female SWO)

Three of four females did not have the passion to continue through the stress of department head tours to acquire commanding officer status.

But I never really had big goals, big dreams. And, so I never caught on to, "I want to be Captain of a ship. I want this power or I want this authority or responsibility." I didn't want to live up to some, some large goal just because it's there.

(separated female SWO)

### *c. Culture*

The culture of the SWO Community is intense and hard to accept for many. The culture accepts game-playing (politics) and a lack of competency in SWO community members. The lack of competency leads to a decrease in pride that community members feel, members do not want to admit they are a SWO. If one does remain in the SWO community long enough to promote to department head, the life is even worse than as a junior officer.

One female participant discussed the fact that the detailing process is a political game also. For someone to get the orders they desire, politics must be played.

... I learned that... you basically have to pull in with your Captain, or you know, I worked with the Admiral... You know, I see how things get done when you've got power behind it. And I just wish that the whole detailing



process... A lot of other communities have a better relationship with their detailers, and it's not so arbitrary as to what they get.

(separated female SWO)

According to a participant, the incompetent leadership places the ship in danger. And, because of rank, does not want to listen to concerns from junior officers.

And to me, that was life-threatening in terms of my own well-being and my people's well-being. I'm scared to travel with these people on a ship to go into war, and to have them be the TAO, Tactical Action Officer, and if the Captain's sleeping or doing something else, use weapons release. And I don't trust this guy, you know. He can't even tie his own shoes. And I don't know,... "Sir, I don't think that's a good idea." He's like, "Oh, don't talk to me that way ensign," and that bullshit. And it's just really frustrating knowing that these people are the ones, [that] are going to be in charge one day.

(separated female SWO)

The promotion system does not promote the best people, but instead the people who have the right amount of time. A female participant remarked that some junior officers are more competent than the department heads, but because of the length of service cannot promote any faster.

And it's frustrating to not be able to move up faster in the chain-of-command because a lot of times you'll have JOs who are more competent than the Department heads.

(separated female SWO)

Similar to the male lateral SWOs, the culture also does not breed pride. One is not excited to say he or she is a Surface Warfare Officer because SWOs are not respected. The poor reputation of the community exists prior to individuals receiving their commission.

I had gotten so many bad reviews about becoming SWO that I was very skeptical about what was going to happen. I was just extremely gung-ho about my new job, and I was going to give everything the best chance I possibly could. But deep inside, I had a feeling I was going to get out—just from spending my time on my ships as a mid-shipman...

(separated female SWO)

And SWOs are just like workhorses, laborers, the, almost like a lower class, like an unwanted...runts that weren't good enough for the others. So, it's a reputation of just being a lower caliber of person that goes SWO.

(separated female SWO)

Additionally, these former officers found the idea of department head tours to be a burden, similar to the current and former SWOs discussed earlier. The department head tours require more time and energy than division officer tours, with little to no return on investment, unless the officer promotes to Captain. According to a participant, department heads are the "whipping boys" of the CO.

... I would want to be a Captain, but the whole idea of being a Department head or an XO (which is something you need to do)...just wasn't desirable to me...It just seems... Department heads basically get beat up all the time... I'm not sure I really had passion for it to go all the way...I think it would have been really fun to be a Captain, but I had no desire to spend about 10 years of my life going through the whole Department head...shore tour and then XO.

(separated female SWO)

## **2. Did you consider a lateral transfer?**

One female participant did transfer to the Human Resource (HR) Community before leaving active duty. She chose to transfer because she realized the SWO Community did not allow her to spend time with family and she wanted to have job satisfaction. However, once a member of the HR Community she worked harder than she did as a SWO. The number of hours she was working persuaded her to leave the Navy. However, she is continuing her affiliation with the Navy by drilling with the Naval Reserve.

I was thinking that I enjoyed the Navy, and I had no gripes about it... I wanted to see if the reason that I didn't want to stay in the Navy was because of the Surface Warfare community. And the reason why I got out of the Navy wasn't because I disliked the Navy. It was just because I... I still think that there's something else out here for me to do.

(separated female SWO)

Two of four female participants did not request a lateral transfer because they wanted to remain in an operational capacity. From their viewpoint, after being a SWO,

other careers would not have the same responsibilities. Without these responsibilities there was not a reason to remain in the Navy.

...Having [been] a SWO and having all of that under your charge, having a ship under your charge, being Officer of the Deck, and knowing all the things that you could do, and being... the one who's running the ship when the Captain's not on the bridge, and having all those people under your control was something that I would never be able to have again. And, I didn't want to stay in the Navy if I couldn't have that.

(separated female SWO)

For others, the Navy could not offer stimulating, fulfilling and rewarding 9 to 5 jobs that would not require separation from family.

### **3. What incentives would have kept you in the SWO community?**

Remaining in the SWO Community requires a big commitment, which many people are not willing to make. For the SWOs who left active duty, the choice to leave was more of a personal life choice than anything that could be solved by offering incentives. However, the participants did feel that the SWOCP is not the reason people remain on active duty, and for them, no amount of money would have changed their mind.

Other incentives that would have possibly retained them are: guaranteed graduate education, sabbatical, geographical stability, better schedule/planning, and flexible career paths.

#### ***a. Geographic Stability***

...I would think that people would want to stay... If they're happy in a place where they could raise their kids; they could have a certain semblance of order. And just, like, "Okay. I can plan for 2 or 3 years that you can graduate from this high school. I can plan that I'm going to be here for this wedding. I can plan my life instead of always just being uprooted and shot somewhere where you don't want to be at.

(separated female SWO)

I don't know that it would persuade me to stay, but it would be a major factor in my decision. My wife is working on her career. We're both in our 20s, so we're relatively young. And she's working on her career. So, one of the major issues that we discussed when I made my decision was, you know, if I were to stay in the Navy, how would that affect her career? And

I know it would negatively affect her career. So, I think it would factor in, but I don't know if it would have me stay

(separated male SWO)

***b. Sabbatical***

Offering a sabbatical would potentially retain two of five participants. Allowing time off to take care of family, or to begin a family would be a benefit because this time would be scheduled and would not interfere with career planning/progression.

I think it might help because, when I say that I separated because...I wanted to spend more time with my family, one of the issues was family planning and having a child, having a baby. So, I think that would give me a chance to...sit down with my wife and plan out our lives and where we might be able to use that. So that we can, we've got time off so that we can have a baby. And I can be home to witness the birth of my child and help my wife out through the pregnancy.

(separated male SWO)

But I think what would have kept me in was that sabbatical, and then more of a plan and a... Though I know everywhere in life is very dynamic, and that you can't really have a plan. But just something that would say, "Okay. You will be guaranteed not to leave for another year." So you can tell your family. You can plan weddings. You can tell people where you're going to be at.

(separated female SWO)

For the others, the idea of a sabbatical is negative, both in terms of how taking a year off would affect his/her reputation but also for promotion and networking opportunities.

I have mixed feelings about that because I just think the SWO community is not to the point where you can necessarily have women doing separate things. I mean, I think maybe in the future that might work, but right now it's just kind ..., "Oh, she took a year off to have a pregnancy." And I think that might be regarded by your peers as, you know, an unfair advantage.

(separated female SWO)

#### **D. SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP THEMES**

The content analysis of the focus group and individual interview transcripts found overlapping themes that cause individuals to leave the community. While the separated SWOs did not discuss the issue of culture to the same extent as the active duty participants, culture appears to be a major underlying issue for all themes and participants.

The female participants do not see how they can chose a family and the Navy. The culture and career pipeline of the community requires that family planning coincide with shore duty, and then that children are left behind while the mother is on deployment. The females also do not see positive female role models when looking at the senior SWO community. Additionally, the women feel the culture and leadership of the community is continuing to condone discrimination and sexual harassment.

The culture of the SWO community has perpetuated the belief that the life of a SWO is hard. The SWO Community is intense and stressful, requiring so much time that it precludes the development of a satisfying personal life or spending quality time with family. Although the participants understand the long workdays while on deployment, in-port workhours do not seem to match the work requirements.

While leadership was listed as a separate theme, the culture could be influencing the behavior of the leadership. Many of the active duty participants found that leadership was sometimes demoralizing and inconsistent. Participants stated that if leadership was consistently competent and respectful, retention would increase.

While only six former Navy Officers participated in the study, it is interesting to note that these individuals expressed more concerns about spending quality time with family and pursuing a career that would provide job satisfaction. It is possible that not being a part of the active duty force allows for some perspective of the subject. However, these individuals admit leaving the community primarily for family reasons.

## **V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **A. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Forty-nine current and previous female and male Surface Warfare Officers (SWOs) participated in focus groups and individual interviews to discuss retention in this Navy community. These discussions provided the opportunity to elicit richer data than could be provided by a survey, and, in fact, can now be used to inform the design of a survey, which will be developed in the near future by researchers at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). A content analysis on the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews uncovered the major themes in the decision to leave the SWO community. The data gained through the focus groups show that individuals choosing to leave the SWO community do so for a variety of reasons. However, overwhelmingly, the participants feel that the culture of the SWO community is intense and requires a tremendous amount of dedication to the detriment of a family or personal life. A summary of the answers to the specific research questions appears below, followed by recommendations for additional research.

#### **1. Why are females leaving the SWO community?**

This thesis sought to answer why women are leaving the SWO community at a greater rate than men. Female SWOs are leaving the community for many of the same reasons civilian women leave the workforce and key among them are family concerns. As noted by Hewlett and Luce (2005), over 40 percent of the 2,443 civilian women interviewed in that study leave the workforce for family reasons. The 23 female participants for this thesis all indicate that family played a role in their decision to leave the SWO Community.

Women in the SWO community are unable to plan a family except on the Navy's schedule. The current career path of the SWO community does not allow for flexibility; billets must be taken at a specific year of commissioned service, and while on the shore duty/rotation. Participating women felt that if a pregnancy occurs while on sea duty there are negative ramifications to their career progression.

Civilian corporations, realizing the need for women to pursue a family, institute programs that promote a healthy work/life balance. For instance, civilian corporations often offer sabbaticals or flexible hours to accommodate outside interests or family. The SWO community, in the current form, does not provide the same flexibility as civilian corporations.

In addition to family issues, the participating female SWOs feel they are facing the challenge of trudging through a male-dominated community that lacks positive female role models. For these women, it is difficult to look up the chain of command and see a female role model to emulate. The junior women see few senior female officers who have a husband, children, and a successful naval career.

Furthermore, many junior women do not feel they have earned the respect of their male counterparts or receive equal treatment. The female participants recounted experiences of discrimination in earning qualifications or work assignments and, these women believe senior leadership condones this behavior. Additionally, some women believe they are still subject to both overt and veiled sexual harassment that is accepted by the leadership. For these women, they do not want to be a part of a community that allows this behavior to continue.

## **2. Are the reasons women leave the community the same as the reasons men leave the community?**

The secondary purpose for this thesis was to see if females and males are leaving the SWO community for the same reasons. Based on the focus groups with these 49 individuals, the answer is predominantly “yes.” Although there are a variety of reasons for leaving, females and males discussed many of the same reasons. There are six overarching similarities between the female and male participants: inconsistent leadership, negative aspects of the culture, lack of passion to become a senior member of the community, work/life balance, working hours, and the nature of some tasks/jobs.

Participants see some of the current leadership of the SWO community as incompetent and disrespectful. To these participating officers, the culture of the SWO community has perpetuated the acceptance of these behaviors. Individuals are promoted based on time in service and acceptance of the Surface Warfare Officer Continuation Pay (SWOCP) instead of promoting the most qualified.

Additionally, many of the participants do not have the passion or desire to drive a ship or subject themselves to the demands of department head tours. The perception exists that the hours required of department heads are worse than what is required of division officers. The numbers of hours these participants are already working in-port preclude the development of a healthy and active personal life (work/life balance) and, by accepting SWOCP their lives will only get worse.

For some, the nature of the tasks they are assigned leads to intense job dissatisfaction. The officers believe their intellectual abilities are not respected and challenged. Instead, the officers feel they continually complete routine and mundane tasks. Other participants are not satisfied with the career path of the community because their jobs are continually changing. These officers believe they would be happier as a SWO if the community allowed a platform or departmental career path, i.e., a career on amphibious ships or in engineering.

To summarize these themes, one can look to job satisfaction. Participants are not satisfied with their current occupation. For these participants, they feel that leaving the community, either for another naval community or civilian life, will make them happy to come to work. In essence, the participants want a life that provides challenges but allows for a personal life.

### **3. Are there differences between the ambition and motivation of women and men?**

A review of pertinent literature found that civilian women and men have different ambitions and motivations with regards to a career. Recent civilian studies have shown that the professional careers of women develop differently from those of men. Women include family concerns when making career decisions. Some women choose to pursue a career and postpone starting a family while others choose to leave the labor force for family-related reasons. Additionally, women are oriented to self-fulfillment while a majority of men are more interested in pursuing high-power jobs. More specifically, women favor participating in jobs that have personal meaning. The study by Hewlett and Luce (2005) discovered that only 15 percent of 2,443 women surveyed had any desire to hold a powerful position in the civilian labor force.



This thesis sought to answer whether military women and men differed in their military career ambition and motivation. The literature suggests that women may be less ambitious and less motivated than men when it comes to seeking high-powered positions. (Fels, 2005) Data from this study were insufficient to confirm these findings.

**4. Are there any incentives/solutions that would keep you in the community?**

One single solution would not keep all 49 participants in the community and, for some, the SWO community could not institute or offer any incentive or solution that would have kept him/her a SWO. Senior SWO leadership will need to remedy a number of underlying problems such as developing more consistent leadership, improving the culture, reducing in-port working hours to allow individuals to develop a healthy work/life balance, and changing some routine jobs to increase intellectual stimulation. Monetary programs or incentives, such as SWOCP, may not be the answer. Non-pecuniary solutions that improve job satisfaction are what are needed according to the participants. Potential non-pecuniary solutions are improving the culture, offering sabbaticals/leave, offering flexible planning/scheduling, geographic stability, and a guaranteed lateral transfer.

Improving the SWO culture was mentioned by all the participants as one solution that would improve overall job satisfaction. The culture would need to value and respect all members. Additionally, participants believe that selecting better qualified people for leadership roles will improve the community from the top-down. Better quality leaders would help in alleviating the “SWO’s eat their young” mentality by reducing the amount of screaming and demeaning language that occurs. Officers would be respected and trusted to use their own judgment in making decisions.

Women found the idea of sabbaticals as intriguing, but not necessarily the best option. Sabbaticals would only delay the inevitability of returning to the pain of department head tours. Instead, these officers believe that allowing individuals to take leave when desired would assist in improving job satisfaction. Although allowing individuals to take leave will help, a problem may still lie in the fact that the schedule of ships is unpredictable. Implementing more predictable scheduling that allows officers to plan their lives was discussed.

Geographic stability would allow the officer's family to develop close ties in the community thereby alleviating some stress while on deployment or underway. However, the officers noted that this concept would likely have negative career implications.

A guaranteed lateral transfer after the department head tours would allow officers to remain in the SWO Community, but know that an alternative is available to them. However, the idea of completing two department head tours is a detractor because of the workload and stress of these tours.

Essentially, the participating officers believe that improving the non-pecuniary aspects of the community will assist in retaining individuals.

## **5. Future Research**

Additional work is required to fully answer the research questions asked in this study, and this work is described next. The data here may be considered exploratory—a foundation for work to be undertaken by NPS faculty. The future research will be conducted in coordination with N-14, Manpower and Personnel Strategic Planning and Analysis.

This thesis faced a limitation in the number of participants available within the allocated time frame. Therefore, additional focus groups and interviews are necessary to ensure that a larger portion of separating SWOs concur with the themes presented in this study. This investigation should query both those leaving the Navy and transferring to a restricted line community.

The additional focus groups should gather data from officers in different locations: east coast, west coast, and overseas, if possible. The current duty station of active duty SWOs may influence the perceptions of these officers. Therefore, a diversity of locations is necessary to preclude a location bias. Also, a larger population of individuals separating from the Navy should be included. One possible pool would be to use the Transition Assistance Program class at various installations to elicit richer data from interviews instead of the exit survey.

In addition, focus groups should be conducted with female SWOs who accepted SWOCP. These women have elected to remain in the community through at least two

department head tours. The reasons they have remained in the community could assist in identifying viable solutions and incentives that may benefit all females.

Given that the active duty females discussed the lack of positive female role models, interviews with senior female leadership are necessary. These women have progressed through the ranks and may have a different view on the issues faced by junior females.

Finally, using the themes uncovered from all focus groups, a survey should be developed and marketed to all Surface Warfare Officers to quantify the qualitative data. From this survey, actionable recommendations to senior leadership should be developed.

## **APPENDIX A: PROTOCOL FOR SWO LATERAL FOCUS GROUPS**

1. Tell us about why you left the SWO community.

Possible probes:

- Give us an example of that.
  - Elaborate on “leadership,” who, what, when, etc.
  - Elaborate on “morale;” provide examples.
  - Elaborate on “culture;” provide examples.
- Tell us more about working hours...for example, did it keep you from doing other things, or were there other factors about the work hours, per se, that bothered you?
- Describe the major stressors.
- Describe the low point of your career
- Did you have a mentor or role models? Please describe.

2. Why did you decide to lateral instead of getting out of the Navy?

Possible Probes:

- What is your intention at this point?
- What would influence you to stay or go?

3. What would have influenced you to stay SWO?

Possible Probes:

- Would you have taken a sabbatical, if offered? What would have been necessary terms for you to take that offer?
- Would you take a sabbatical now?
- How much bigger would the bonus have needed to be for you to take it?
- If you had taken the bonus and stayed, would that have eliminated all of your problems with the SWO community?
- Look at this list of options. Do any of them see like policy options that you feel would strongly influence SWO retention?

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## **APPENDIX B: PROTOCOL FOR CURRENT SWO FOCUS GROUPS**

1. What is your current intention (remain a SWO, lateral or leave the Navy?)
2. If you are leaving the SWO community, why?

Possible probes:

- Give us an example of that.
  - Elaborate on “leadership,” who, what, when, etc.
  - Elaborate on “morale;” provide examples.
  - Elaborate on “culture;” provide examples.
- Tell us more about working hours...for example, did it keep you from doing other things, or were there other factors about the work hours, per se, that bothered you?
- Describe the major stressors.
- Describe the low point of your career
- Did you have a mentor or role models? Please describe.

3. If you are considering a lateral transfer from SWO why instead of leaving the Navy?

Possible Probes:

- What is your intention at this point?
  - What would influence you to stay or go?
4. What would influence you to stay SWO?

Possible Probes:

- Would you have taken a sabbatical, if offered? What would have been necessary terms for you to take that offer?
- Would you take a sabbatical now?
- How much bigger would the bonus have needed to be for you to take it?
- If you had taken the bonus and stayed, would that have eliminated all of your problems with the SWO community?
- Look at this list of options. Do any of them see like policy options that you feel would strongly influence SWO retention?

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## **APPENDIX C: PROTOCOL FOR SEPARATED SWOS**

1. What specifically caused you to leave the SWO Community?

Possible probes:

- Give us an example of that.
  - Elaborate on “leadership,” who, what, when, etc.
  - Elaborate on “morale;” provide examples.
  - Elaborate on “culture;” provide examples.
- Tell us more about working hours...for example, did it keep you from doing other things, or were there other factors about the work hours, per se, that bothered you?
  - Describe the major stressors.
  - Describe the low point of your career
  - Did you have a mentor or role models? Please describe.

2. Did you think of laterally transferring to another community?

3. What would have influenced you to stay SWO?

Possible Probes:

- Would you have taken a sabbatical, if offered? What would have been necessary terms for you to take that offer?
- Would you take a sabbatical now?
- How much bigger would the bonus have needed to be for you to take it?



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## **APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Please respond to the following questions.

1. What year group do you belong to?
2. How many years of commissioned service do you have?
3. Were you prior enlisted? If so, how long were you enlisted?
4. What is your marital status?
5. If you have a spouse/fiancée what is his/her occupation (if any)?
6. Do you have children? If so, what are their ages?
7. How many ships have you been assigned to?
8. What was the percentage (best estimate) of women in the wardroom of your ship(s)?
9. Are there any additional comments you would like to add to our discussion today?
10. Based on the lists we discussed today, please list and rank what you feel are the top 3 “dissatisfiers” for men and women in the SWO community.
11. Based on the policy options list, list the top 3 options you think could positively influence retention for the SWO community.

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## **APPENDIX E: POLICY PROPOSALS**

- Off-ramp/on-ramp (non-punitive break in service)
- Home-basing / geographic stability
- Higher pay / SWOCP
- Guaranteed lateral transfer after DH tours
- Guaranteed graduate education
- Improved SWO culture
- Personal extended leaves
- Extended shore tour

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